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Their Colours and their Forms
Artists' Responses to Wordsworth



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Carol McKay and John Strachan

Art Editions North
The Wordsworth Trust

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Edited by Mike Collier and John Strachan with assistance from Janet Ross
Designed by Manny Ling

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Their Colours and their Forms: Artists' Responses to Wordsworth is an exhibition shown at
the Wordsworth Museum, Grasmere, between 2 February and 10 March 2013.

This mixed-media exhibition, featuring the work of a number of notable
contemporary artists, offers a series of imaginative responses to Wordsworth. It
uses Wordsworth's life and poetry — and the manuscripts of William and Dorothy
displayed in the Museum — as the inspiration for sculpture, fine art, poetry,
calligraphy, electronic music, conceptual installation and a number of 'creative walks'
in the Grasmere area. All of the artworks are specially conceived for the exhibition,
which features the work of artists, composers and creative writers including Tim
Brennan, Mike Collier, David Harsent, Manny Ling, John Strachan, Robert Strachan,
Brian Thompson, Sam Wiehl and Tony Williams.

Their Colours and their Forms is curated by Mike Collier, John Strachan and Brian
Thompson in collaboration with the School of Humanities and Creative Industries at
Bath Spa University and w.a.l.k. (Walking, Art, Landskip and Knowledge: www.walk.uk.net), an interdisciplinary research centre based at the University of Sunderland
which examines the way in which cultural practitioners engage with the world through
walking). The curators are grateful for the financial sponsorship of the universities
of Bath Spa, Northumbria and Sunderland and for the support and assistance of Jeff
Cowton MBE and his colleagues at the Wordsworth Trust. This book was designed by
Manny Ling.

The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love.

William Wordsworth, 'Lines Composed a Few Miles
above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye
during a Tour. July 13, 1798', ll. 77–81.

Acknowledgements

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We are also grateful to the following individuals:

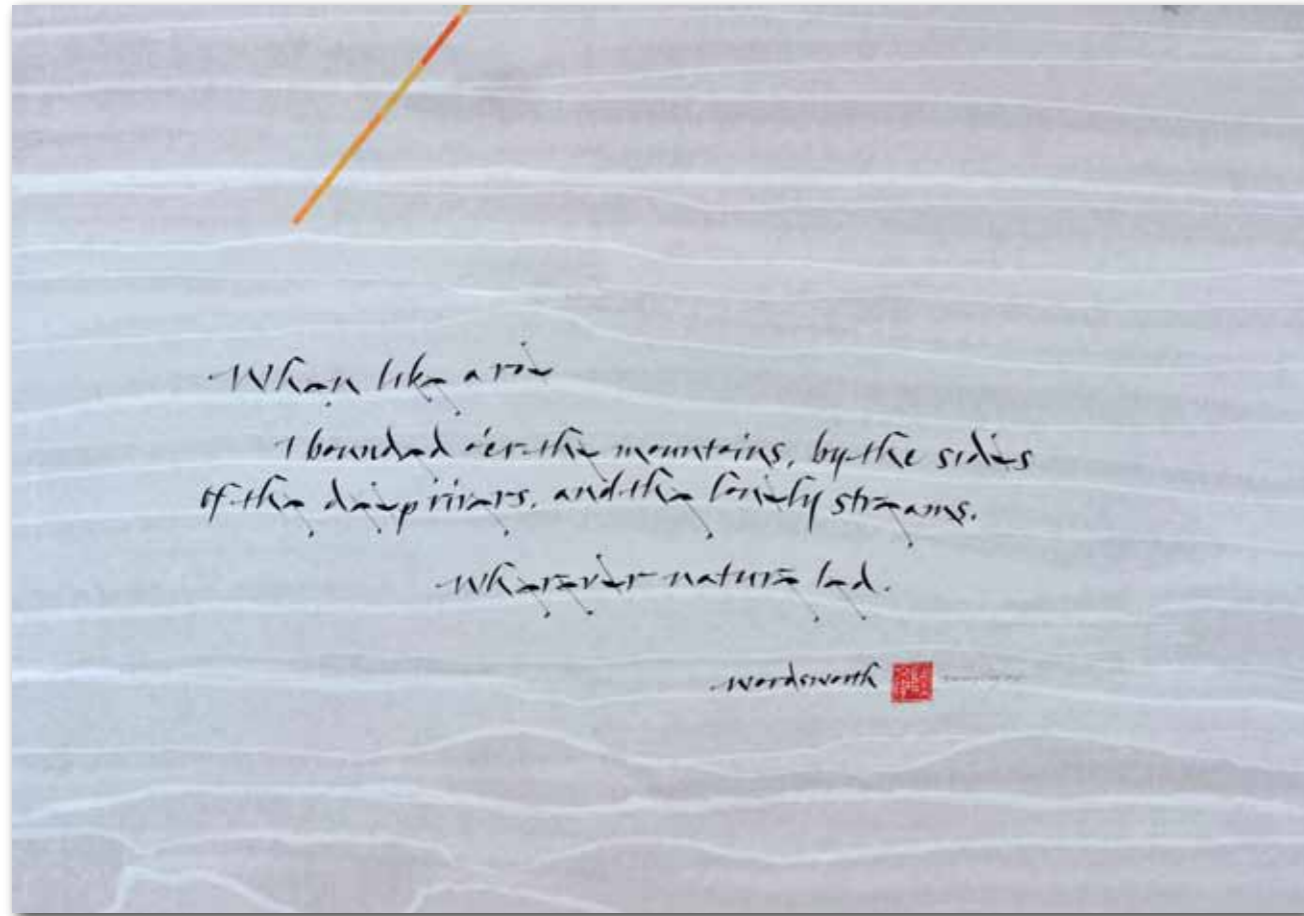
Dr Steve May, Dean of the School of Humanities and Cultural Industries,
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Professor Richard Terry, University of Northumbria at Newcastle

Dr Jane Moore, Cardiff University

Graeme Thompson, Dean of Faculty of Arts, Design and Media,
University of Sunderland

Art Editions North with Mike Collier and Peter Davies



Manny Ling
 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey,
 on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour,
 July 13, 1798' by Wordsworth
 2013 Chinese Xuan paper, Sumi ink, Chinese
 brushes, metal leaves, Manuscript Chronicle nibs
 33.5 x 47 cms (Courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust)

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Foreword

No portrait this, with Academic air!

This is the poet and his poetry.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning,

‘On a Portrait of Wordsworth by B. R. Haydon’ (1842)

Their Colours and their Forms presents a brilliantly eclectic collection of modern artistic responses to William and Dorothy Wordsworth and the wonderful manuscript collections of the Wordsworth Trust at Dove Cottage.

Unlike any other English writer except Shakespeare, Wordsworth has encouraged and provoked creativity as later generations of painters and poets sought colours and words that might capture the elusive magic of his language. While satirists leapt to try to ridicule him, tourists were vigorously striding out in his footsteps. And as Frances Blanchard’s *Portraits of Wordsworth* reveals, Wordsworth the man was also a subject of energetic artistic endeavour: portraits of him abound in oils, watercolours, sketches and statuary.

Their Colours and their Forms updates this vibrant tradition by gathering together creative engagements with Wordsworth *now* — in paintings, sculptures, performance art, electronic composition, creative walking and — yes! — in poetry. Wordsworth liked to think that, among later poets and artists, some would be his ‘second selves’. Gathered in this book are a most distinguished company of them: Tim Brennan, Mike Collier, David Harsent, Manny Ling, Carol McKay, John Strachan, Robert Strachan, Brian Thompson, Sam Wiehl and Tony Williams.

Collective and collaborative in its inspiration, *Their Colours and their Forms* is a project between artists who share a Wordsworthian vision. Despite perceptions of Wordsworth as a solitary figure, wandering lonely in pursuit of his ‘egotistical sublime’, to borrow John Keats’s fine phrase, community was also vital to his



Portrait of William Wordsworth 1806
Henry Edridge (1769–1821)
Pencil and Watercolour 15.5 x 12.5 cms

imagination. His first published poem was a sonnet about another poet, Helen Maria Williams. At Dove Cottage the household gods were Chaucer, Milton, Chatterton and Burns. Dorothy Wordsworth’s wild eyes and attentive ears quickened much of her brother’s greatest writing — and prompts to poetry came from further afield, too, from friends such as Sir Humphry Davy, B. R. Haydon, Sir Walter Scott and Sir George Beaumont. *The Prelude*, Wordsworth’s autobiographical masterpiece, his lifelong endeavour, he thought of as a ‘joint labour’ with S. T. Coleridge.

In exactly that communal Wordsworthian spirit, *Their Colours and their Forms* shows us Wordsworth’s poetry participating in a continuing flow of creation — stirring and provoking fresh artistic engagements with its powerful, troubling and inspiring achievement. As we approach the 250th anniversary of the poet’s birth, what we see and hear in this book is William Wordsworth’s arrival in our new century as a living, creative force — an inspiration for us all.

Nicholas Roe

(University of St Andrews, Trustee of the Wordsworth Trust)

Their Colours and their Forms: Artists' Responses to Wordsworth

Carol McKay and John Strachan



Figure 1
Brian Thompson
Frozen River 2012
Float Glass
25.5 x 33 x 14 cms

Flowing through Brian Thompson's glass sculpture 'Frozen River' (2012; figures 1 & 2), part of the Wordsworth Trust's permanent art collection, are the first lines of the first version of William Wordsworth's great autobiographical poem *The Prelude* (1799; 1804; 1805; 1850). The words run through the glass like fish through a river:

Was it for this

That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved

To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song,

And, from his alder shades and rocky falls,

And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice

That flowed along my dreams?

Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1799), l. 1–6

Thompson's work, inspired by John Strachan's biographical essay included here, captures the moment in Goslar in the winter of 1798 — a moment near the heart of British Romanticism — in which the poet appears convinced of his own artistic failure in his mission of writing the great philosophical poem *The Recluse*, a work which S. T. Coleridge was sure it was his destiny to write. Wordsworth chided himself for his lack of progress. How had it come to this? He, someone who thought of himself at Cambridge as a 'bard elect', someone who had the best

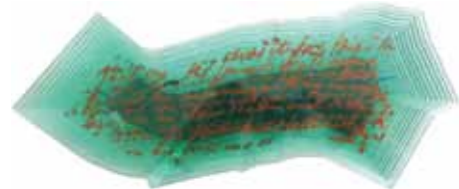


Figure 2
Brian Thompson
Frozen River (top view)
2012
Float Glass
25.5 x 33 x 14 cms

childhood, he was certain, for a poet of nature in the English Lake District. In a sense of loss and poetic failure, Wordsworth picked up a notebook in which he and Dorothy had captured their impressions of some of their German travels and scribbled — urgently and quickly — upon it. These lines, which mark the foundational moment of *The Prelude*, are part of what is now known as 'MSJJ' (see figure 3), one of the great manuscript treasures of the Wordsworth Trust (they are discussed in detail in John Strachan's biographical essay on p.80).

It was that day in chilly Goslar which began the long process of the composition of Wordsworth's posthumously-published masterpiece, the 'Poem to Coleridge' which the poet's widow Mary published in 1850 as *The Prelude*. And that moment continues to prompt artistic innovation in the twenty-first century. It is certainly evident in Thompson's work, which, like all of the exhibits in *Their Colours and their Forms*, sees the writings of Wordsworth — and also those of his great sister Dorothy — as germinal. Wordsworth, in our day as in his, retains the power to inspire, to provoke and to stimulate. This exhibition is tribute to the poet's capacity to inspire creative thought and creative practice in a range of artistic forms, whether paintings, sculptures, performance art, electronic composition, creative walking and, indeed, in verse.

Let us return to Brian Thompson's 'Frozen River' to reflect further on the varied modes of walking that inform this and other examples of his practice. Walking, as we will see, is an important connecting thread, a path leading back from the artists and writers in this exhibition to Wordsworth and his sister. We want to consider the creative echo of the poet's footsteps, together with the murmuring of artistic and literary voices that accompanied him and others on their varied creative journeys.

Walking requires embodied action. It can also evoke a cacophony



Figure 3
'Was it for this' (1798), from MSJJ
(Courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust)

of imaginative responses. For many of the artists and writers in this exhibition, walking is both inspiration and subject matter for the work they make. Yet, as many of the works here suggest, walking can also be a creative activity in its own right: as we walk by ourselves and with others, noting, observing, chatting, thinking or simply day-dreaming. Just wandering lonely, to borrow a phrase. Sometimes we record our journeys as we move through space, from location to location, with cameras, videos or notebooks to hand. Folded maps and electronic navigating systems now allow us to get lost but also to find ourselves again. All of this and more can become the very material of creative practice.

The paths and maps of walks — both his own and those made by others — are recurring themes in Brian Thompson's work. He is continuously fascinated by the physical journeys we make in and through places, and how these are mapped, recorded and valued. So 'Frozen River' (see figures 1 & 2) is literally shaped by and from topographical records, its layers traced from maps of the Derwent and Goslar in Germany, places where Wordsworth walked and that inspired some of his greatest writing, places that are geographically distant yet connected visually here in Thompson's sculpture and through the act of poetic reflection that is Wordsworth's *Prelude*.

Walking, of course, is a means by which we can explore places, man-made or otherwise. Paths get worn, compress and build up over generations, leaving a physical trace on the surface. Some paths are illicit — shortcuts by which generations of walkers make places their own. Other paths are deliberately hidden or secret, as in the safe routes to freedom so important to those endeavouring to escape the shackles of slavery in nineteenth-century North America. This underground railroad of secret routes, safe houses and secretly coded meeting

points formed the inspiration for earlier sculptures by Thompson. In a remote site amidst the woods and hills of Solsberry, Indiana, his iron-cast sculptures in the 'Underground Railroads' series (see figure 4) are physical reinstatements, formal remembrances of these precarious transit routes. Traces in the world and of particular spaces, they simultaneously chart a topographical imaginary whilst revealing something of its history. They are souvenirs too of so many lives in motion, asking us to imagine how we come to know and how we navigate our way through our lives.

Thompson's work is characterized by its specific approach to form and considered use of materials. The cast-iron of the 'Underground Railroads' series, for instance, in its solidity and weight contrasts the translucent glass layers of 'Frozen River.' Where the sited and grounded substantiality of the former dares us never to forget, the latter invites us to see ourselves reflected in the depths of Wordsworth's words. Glass here of course is also a visual metaphor for the frozen surfaces of Goslar, which trapped William and Dorothy during that long bitter winter of 1798: housebound, immobile, writing and remembering.

In making a series of walks in and around the Lake District, which literally shape and add form to many of his works in the exhibition, Thompson is consciously emulating the walking patterns of William and Dorothy. Both were vigorous walkers whenever they could, often together, sometimes with others, sometimes alone. Their walk from Wensleydale across the Pennines to their new home in Grasmere in the last days of 1799 has almost mythic status: the walk of brother and sister in the midst of yet another bitter midwinter both a homemaking and a homecoming. They had walked some of their now-familiar routes some six years earlier, on a tour described by Dorothy in one

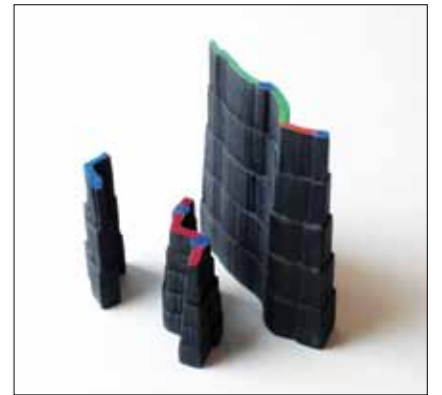


Figure 4
Brian Thompson
Underground Railroads 1, 2 & 3
2010
Wood and Paper
1: 5.5 x 2.5 x 1.5 cms
2: 4.7 x 4.5 x 2.0 cms
3: 9.4 x 7.5 x 2.0 cms



Figure 5
Brian Thompson
Lake Windermere to the
Viewing Station 2012
Painted Oak (burnt sienna)
16.5 x 8.7 x 3.7 cms



Figure 6
Brian Thompson
To Rydal Grotto 2012
Fruit Wood (plum)
15.6 x 7.6 x 3.4 cms

of her letters: ‘I walked with my brother at my side, from Kendal to Grasmere, eighteen miles, and afterwards from Grasmere to Keswick, fifteen miles, through the most delightful country that ever was seen.’ Dorothy’s matter-of-fact description of the distances seems even more extraordinary when we consider the conditions of her walking — no specialist shoes or protective clothing, no GPS, no mobile phone in case of emergency. Coming to the end of his own epic walking of the Pennine Way in 2010, poet Simon Armitage recalls glancing round at his fellow walkers, to see his mother pulling a black recyclable bin bag over her head as protection from a sudden downpour. One wonders what Dorothy might have done in similar circumstances.

Like a number of the artists here, Thompson embraces new technologies of making and walking. He deliberately records some of his re-walks with modern satellite navigation. Tracking his movement through space, the lines inscribed by the technology become the first notation, the outline drawing, for the sculptures he subsequently fabricates using technically sophisticated water-jet cutters. Through the layering of such processes, Thompson approximates the footsteps of the Wordsworths, all the time aware of other fellow travellers: Gilpin, Turner and the many others who navigated similar paths in search of the picturesque, the best view. ‘Lake Windermere to the Viewing Station’ (see figure 5) is a three-dimensional record of one such well-trodden path, as is ‘To Rydal Grotto’ (see figure 6). The materials of Thompson’s sculptures are once more complexly significant. Constructed from indigenous species – plum, elm, wisteria, chestnut — they acknowledge the detailed observations of place so important to the Wordsworths. There is an unplanned contemporary poignancy in ‘Skiddaw from West to East’ (see figure 7), one of his mountain series, which is fabricated from ash; in other instances such as ‘Easedale Tarn to Goody Bridge’ (see figure 8), overlaying native materials with Italian

earth pigments evokes different historical cartographies and exchanges. Burnt and raw sienna pigment over native English oak becomes a material metaphor for all that walking to and fro between here and there, near and far, of the Romantics, their walking predecessors and their peripatetic successors. Thompson’s digital prints offer an alternative visualization of his creative walking process. Again, they are coded memories or traces of well-trodden routes. Lines traced here are layered over abstracted, pixilated maps (see figure 9), evoking a contemporary digital cartography, and yet also bringing to mind the much-cited words of twentieth-century painter Paul Klee, for whom ‘drawing is taking a line for a walk’.

As already suggested, then, Dorothy and William Wordsworth are key figures in any account of the relation between creative practice and walking today, just as their place, their Lake District, continues to inspire countless numbers of walkers to follow in their footsteps. For many of the artists and writers themselves — as for the Wordsworths — there is much creative excitement around the humble act of going for a walk, as well as many challenges in terms of how we understand its potential.

In the opening lines of ‘The Two Thieves; or, the Last Stage of Avarice’ (1800), Wordsworth himself evokes the work of another great artist-walker:

O now that the genius of Bewick were mine,
And the skill which he learned on the banks of the Tyne,
Then the Muses might deal with me just as they chose,
For I’d take my last leave both of verse and of prose.

What feats would I work with my magical hand!
Book-learning and books should be banished the land.



Figure 7
Brian Thompson
Skiddaw from West to East 2012
Ash 16.4 x 15.8 x 6.0 cms



Figure 8
Brian Thompson
Easedale Tarn to Goody Bridge 2012
Painted Oak (burnt sienna)
21.4 x 14.0 x 7.0 cms



Figure 9
Brian Thompson
Helvellyn by Striding Edge 2012
Digital Print 40 x 30 cms

The Bewick he refers to is of course the great wood-engraver and illustrator Thomas Bewick: yet another formidable pedestrian for whom ‘being there’, moving in an through place, was central to and engagement with an understanding of nature. In 1776, at the age of 23, between completing his apprenticeship to the engraver and book-maker Ralph Beilby and settling down to establish his own family business, Bewick embarked on a mammoth 500-mile walk from Newcastle to the Highlands of Scotland. He described the motivations for this period in his life in terms that resonate still, as numerous artists and writers continue to walk as a mode of creative exploration and technique of imaginative liberation:

Having all my life, at home, at school and during my apprenticeship lived under perpetual restraints — when I thus felt myself at liberty, I became as I suppose, like a bird which had escaped from its cage.

A Memoir of Thomas Bewick, Written by Himself (1862)

This liberating interlude of sustained walking is described at length in the memoir he began drafting in 1822, six years before his death. His self-identification with other walkers, other people of the streets, appears throughout the memoir and is at one with his identity as an artist, best known as he is as a practitioner of the ‘plain man’s art’, a printer from wood-blocks who provided a new and accessible visualization of nature and the details of natural history through the many books he illustrated.

By the time he embarked on his memoirs however, Bewick’s

walking practice had been partially eclipsed by that of the younger Romantic artists; by Wordsworth, for instance, as in 1790 with fellow student Robert Jones he walked away after his University of Cambridge exams, through France into the Alps and Switzerland. Where Bewick covered many of his miles out of necessity, from Cherryburn to work in Newcastle, a regular walking commute, Wordsworth made walking central to his life and art. Where, for Bewick, walking was a means to an end or an interlude of escape from daily responsibilities, for Wordsworth it was the very act and form of culture. As Rebecca Solnit argues in *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (2001), for Wordsworth ‘walking was a mode not of travelling but of being’, and it is to Wordsworth that we often look in compiling a genealogy of artistic walking practices. We associate him of course with walking (and talking) in the landscape, sometimes on his own, often with companions, friends and family; but he also for many years walked up and down his garden terrace in Rydal, the physicality — and domesticity — of the action part of his creative process. Many of his poems seem to have been composed whilst walking, or as drafts, read aloud with walking companions. Walking becomes a poetic device and formal structure. Walks and walkers are the subject, often in the early poems denoting political sympathies, for peasants and pedlars, vagrants, displaced and political wanderers. And some of his walking, notably in France at a time of Revolutionary upheavals, was both the political gesture of an ardent young man and the beginnings of a sustained creative journey.

Acknowledging the contemporary social construction and political significance of walking, artist Tim Brennan has developed an experimental creative methodology that he refers to as *manoeuvres*. All of his *manoeuvres* in some way reconfigure the organized guided walk,



Figure 10
Tim Brennan
Codex: Crusade
2004
(Publisher: Art Editions North)



Figure 11
Tim Brennan
Verdute Manoeuvre
2011
Information as material

'The Knowledge' exhibition, 54th Venice Biennale, Gervesuti Foundation, 2011
(Photo Emma Stark, 2011)

either as shared performance or associated manifestation in the form of guide-books and, more recently, downloadable apps for smart phones. His *manoeuvres* tend to be place-specific; some are localized while others are durational and long-distance. His *Crusade* (2004) (see figure 10), for instance, followed the route of the Jarrow marchers, a twenty-five day walk from South Tyneside to the House of Commons, whilst his more recent *Verdute Manoeuvre* at the 2011 Venice Biennale (see figure 11), traced a circumscribed route around St. Mark's Square, using specific paintings by the artist Canaletto as route markers. In many of his walks Brennan walks with others, performing the role of guide, and in one sense embodying a very recognizable presence as he acts out the functionality of countless other such figures in diverse contexts. But as guide he is also a far more imaginary and porous figure, one who finds his place in the world by ventriloquizing the words, observations and actions of others who may once have been there. Leading a group of participants along a set route, he pauses at preselected stopping points, which he then seeks to activate through a web of quotations, invoking a cacophony of voices that variously describe, remark on or otherwise narrate stories of specific locations and the places they in turn connect to. In vocalizing such accounts anew while walking with others, Brennan's *manoeuvres* seek to provoke still more conversations, shared murmurings that may be insightful or political, flirtatious or humorous, and probably all at once.

Talking, indeed, is as important as walking in many of Brennan's *manoeuvres*. By invoking various voices he seeks to generate multi-layered accounts of places, of multiple pasts and present identities. This sense of the complexity of place has echoes of Wordsworth, as does Brennan's continual embrace of the walking tour as creative

methodology. For Brennan, though, the wonder of any situation derives not from its role within a natural order, but from its location within language and culture, within discourse. His use of discursive quotations — as ready-mades and found materials — may indeed be at odds with Wordsworth's Romantic aesthetics. Yet, underneath, there is a compelling similarity in difference, in the subjectivity and imaginary force of both artists' response to place. More, through his walking itineraries, Brennan continually draws attention to the quotidian and everyday: it is not the special or the noteworthy that makes for the experience, but anything and everything, depending on how we look at it. The weather and the corner shop, the people we meet along the way, the shoes or boots on our feet: in this attentiveness to the ordinary we can again trace a path back to Wordsworth.

Brennan has spoken of his long-standing fascination for the Wordsworthian sublime. In his earlier project *The NORTH*, for instance, he explored the visual aesthetics of Romanticism in a series of images and objects that deliberately juxtaposed lo-fi technologies (low resolution phone cameras) with a quasi-abstract language of colour and form (see figures 12 & 13). He is drawn to the experience of self-transcendence that for many lies at the core of the sublime, and this has become a central preoccupation in his most recent practice. Duration and endurance are twin aspects of his approach, as in his extraordinary *Roman Runner Manoeuvre* in which he undertakes to run the boundaries of the Roman Empire (he has recently competed the northernmost limits, along both Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall). In this he embraces the potential dissolution of the self in the sheer immensity and immediacy of the experience, whilst invoking possibilities for return and renewal, as mediated through the various



Figure 12
Tim Brennan
Ashbrooke Clearing
Lightjet print 2006
112.5 cms x 150 cms



Figure 13
Tim Brennan
Ancient Wood
Lightjet print 2006
112.5 cms x 150 cms



Figure 14
Tim Brennan
iAmbic Pedometer: Ur Manoeuvre
January 2013
Performance and video using an
Apple iPhone 3G
Duration: 1:37:52

artistic traces or ‘by-products’ of his practice which are transmitted to others using both traditional and digital media. The videos he posts on YouTube, for instance, neatly convey a sense of his subjective immersion in the process, tempered by sociability and more everyday madness (we see him mending his running shoes with patches from an old orange cagoule in his university office).

‘iAmbic Pedometer: Ur Manoeuvre’, the title of his video installation in this exhibition is characteristic of Brennan’s invention with words. His neologism references the unrhymed iambic pentameter or blank verse, one of the most common metrical rhythms in English poetry. As a great exponent of the form, Wordsworth exploited its seemingly natural and conversational rhythms in much of his work. ‘iAmbic Pedometer: Ur Manoeuvre’ is unedited hand-held video footage of a walk Brennan made through Sunderland, the duration of the walk in this case dictated by the battery life in his iPhone (see figure 14). Wordsworth never visited Wearside as far as we know, but Sunderland is Brennan’s home: he was born there and now works and lives there again. Like Wordsworth, his creative practice continually returns to a central hub. At the time of preparing this essay for print, Brennan’s walk was still imaginary, a future-tense prospect open to accident, encounter and insult. So — perhaps — we see him leaving home once again to manoeuvre his way through his urban surroundings, moving more slowly this time, as he walks and talks, mumbling incessantly to himself as he goes. In the very process of walking, the familiarity of place becomes unfamiliar, a stage for creative performance. Only occasionally do his murmurs become more cogent, passages of comparative lucidity that give us some clue to his ventriloquizing Wordsworth’s words from *The Prelude*. Or perhaps he is more an urban shamanic poet, speaking in tongues on the edge of (in)

coherence, whilst struggling with the technology and the kit.

‘Their Colours and their Forms’, the title for this exhibition, borrows, of course, from Wordsworth’s ‘Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798’. Recollecting an earlier visit to the same location, the poem evokes an animal-like responsiveness to the sensory pleasures of being in nature, a mode of being in place that takes us before and beyond walking:

when like a roe
I bounded o’er the mountains, by the sides
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
Wherever nature led.

Part of the poem is addressed to the poet’s ‘dearest Friend’, ‘my dear, dear Sister’ Dorothy, who accompanies him and in whom he apprehends:

My former pleasures in the shooting lights
Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while
May I behold in thee what I was once.

Continuous companion to her brother, Dorothy’s spontaneous apprehension of the detail of nature encountered through walking was described in many of her journals. None were published during her lifetime, but nevertheless they were a lifetime’s work, at least until she was struck down by debilitating illness. For her brother, as for many others of the time and later, Dorothy’s creative sensibility, and the language of natural description through which it is articulated, is



Figure 15
Mike Collier
Gowbarrow, Misty Morning, Daffodils 2012
(From Dorothy Wordsworth's journal entry, 15 April 1802)
Digital Print 25 x 12 cms
(Courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust)

imagined in specific terms, as both woman-like and child-like, natural and intuitive, as when the older brother–poet catches in her innocent voice ‘the language of my former heart’.

Mike Collier’s recent paintings and prints respond to this complex myth of Dorothy, as sister, walker, writer, observer. More specifically, he takes inspiration from her journals held in the collections of the Wordsworth Trust. In creatively reworking pages from the journals he draws our attention to the materiality of both writing and walking and to the specificity of her observations. Dorothy’s handwritten and precisely dated pages are repurposed by the artist, in a process that combines new digital formats with traditional painterly experiment. Collier fabricates new senses from words first inscribed by Dorothy, for instance, from notes made from a walk on 15 April 1802, in which she first describes the array of splendid daffodils that so famously reappeared five years later in the first publication of her brother’s poem commonly known by the same name. Collier extracts and elaborates specific words and phrases: *Gowbarrow*, *Misty Morning*, *Daffodils*. Each letter of each word is embodied anew in his print as echoing layers of form and colour, in turn juxtaposed with printed text that serves also as the title, *the wind seized our breath* (see figure 15). Meaning literally stretches beyond the words in the small but elongated vertical format of the print that in turn evokes the unfurled scrolls of Japanese Haiku. Materials, meaning and process are interlinked here, as in all of Collier’s work. In this case, the relevant pages from Dorothy’s journal are digitally scanned so that isolated letters can be transferred onto square blocks of colour fabricated from locally sourced pastels.

The same technique is used in Collier’s print *The Ring* which refers to the page from Dorothy’s journal of 4 October 1802 in which she

describes her feelings on the morning of her brother’s wedding (see figures 16 & 17). This is a famous and much-discussed journal entry — one which is also the focus of a new poem for this exhibition and publication by the poet David Harsent (see p.51). Dorothy’s famous lines are reproduced in her own script within the coloured squares of Collier’s print: ‘lay in stillness, neither hearing or seeing anything’.

What *was* she thinking?, Collier seems to be asking. Two sentences on this page of the original manuscript have been heavily crossed out. We are not sure who crossed them out, or why, or what the deleted words actually say. Collier leaves the erasures intact, instead inviting the viewer to imagine what lies beneath.

Fascinatingly fragile objects, Dorothy’s manuscripts bear the physical imprint of their maker, the handwriting both expressive and opaque, strange to contemporary eyes more used to words and letters on a screen or on a printed page. Yet, as Collier’s work demonstrates, words and their individual letters can resonate with meaning peculiar to themselves. In other prints and original artworks here, he colours directly over scanned text from Dorothy’s journal, in a kind of double erasure that simultaneously masks and draws attention to her words, to her characteristically fresh powers of natural description (see figures 20 & 21, on p.27). Such language is a constant fascination for the artist and such words literally add shape to the form of his larger-scale paintings and prints. The familiar unfamiliarity of vernacular names, dialects of birds and plants once known but fleetingly remembered, are often incorporated into abstract visual architectures that in turn hint back to the specificity of places and their ecological frameworks.

In all of his work, Collier explores the relationship between writing, artwork and the phenomenological apprehension of localities, as

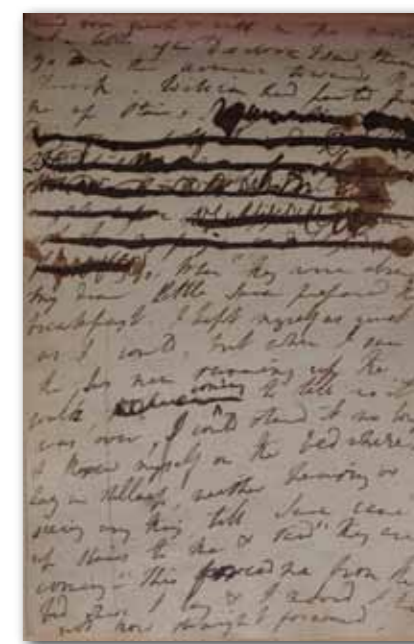


Figure 16
From Dorothy Wordsworth's journal entry dated Tuesday 26th July (actually the 27th) covering the period from then until 8th October 1802
(Courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust)



Figure 17
Mike Collier
The Ring 2012
Digital Print 30 x 18 cms
(Courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust)



Figure 18
Mike Collier
Street Flowers: Urban Survivors of the Privileged Land. A curated walk for the AV Festival in 2012

Walking away from the National Glass Centre, 7.45am on the 25th March 2012 (Photography: Daniel Magill)



Figure 19
Mike Collier
The Ancient Brotherhood of Mountains: there was a loud uproar in the hills 2012 (From To Joanna, Poems on the Naming of Places) Digital Print 120 x 120 cms (produced in collaboration with Emma Tominey)

experienced primarily through the embodied practice of walking. He is another formidable artist-walker and walking in the company of others is a key part of his work. In a contemporary sense these journeys begin to reinvigorate the art of natural observation so important to Bewick and the Wordsworths. Collier curates walks that are inherently sociable, their meandering format inviting conversation and the sharing of knowledge even (or perhaps especially) among strangers. As process, the walking is ephemeral. It is repeatable, but never replicable, the vagaries of weather and seasonal patterns ensuring this. For some, the walking is enough in itself. Their engagement in the process ends with the cup of tea at the end of the walk. Others may use the experience as springboard or inspiration for other creative experiments, photographic or otherwise. The shared experience, for Collier, generates new knowledge of species and plant-life encountered during the walk. This ‘botanizing’ combines with the diverse individual perceptions and social observations that inevitably emerge as the conversations develop and the walk unfolds in its place-specific way. All of this serves as material for thought, to be layered intuitively into the fabric of the abstract paintings and drawings he constructs back in the studio.

Many of Collier’s curated walks are also collaborations, slow — moving explorations of urban ‘edgelands’, those in between, marginal and often unsung places where rural and urban coincide, where ‘wildness’ survives or infiltrates. Led by Collier and naturalist Keith Bowey, his recent ‘Street Flowers: Urban Survivors’ took a group of fifteen on a walking, talking, pausing, listening exploration of the Wear’s riverside (see figure 18). At various moments on the four-hour walk, participants found themselves considering the signs of spring underfoot on a much-trampled path, beside an overspill University

car park; exploring the flora clinging to the surviving brickwork traces of Sunderland’s once-dominant industries; marvelling at the bird-life on the Wear’s marshland. And listening of course to those sounds of wildness normally obscured by the clamour of the city. For some, there may be a renewed astonishment in the process, a shift in our usual patterns of city occupancy, and growing awareness of our tendency to overlook.

The large-scale print titled *The Ancient Brotherhood of Mountains: there was a loud uproar in the hills* included here is characteristic in its responsiveness both to place and to culture (see figure 19). Collier, like Wordsworth, has walked the mountains of the Lake District many times. As so many others have done before and since, he has found himself standing on their summits, looking, pointing and naming the others that stretch out around, seemingly boundless yet enclosing. The title is borrowed from Wordsworth’s poem ‘To Joanna’, evoking the poet’s own similar act of poetic recognition, his naming that is also an echoing, a voicing back from the tors themselves. But the words in Collier’s print take us back even further, to the oldest derivations of these same mountain names; in turn these words become encircling forms, literally embedded in the natural pigments that surround them.

The next of our artists, and the first creative writer, is the distinguished poet David Harsent, winner of the Forward Prize and, for his most recent collection, *Night* (2011), the Griffin International Poetry Prize (see figure 22). Harsent’s powerful poem ‘Effaced’ (see p.51) included here is again primarily concerned with Dorothy Wordsworth and with one of the most mysterious episodes in her life and her love for her brother. Harsent’s poem describes a Dorothy ‘widowed without being wed’, and his epigraph refers to one of the key manuscripts in



Figure 20
Mike Collier
Good Friday 1 2012 (From Dorothy Wordsworth’s journal entry, Friday 16th April 1802) Digital Print 15 x 10 cms (Courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust)



Figure 21
Mike Collier
Good Friday 2 2012 (From Dorothy Wordsworth’s journal entry, Friday 16th April 1802) Digital Print 15 x 10 cms (Courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust)

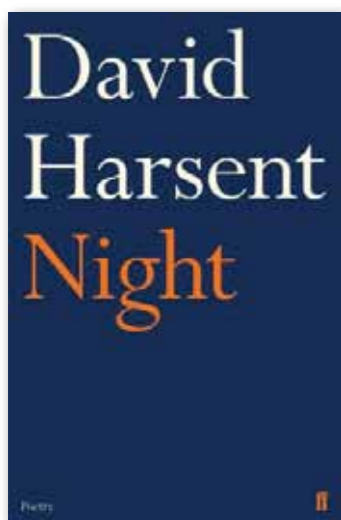


Figure 22
David Harsent
Night 2011

the Trust's collection, one which does not yield up all of its secrets even to this day: 'On the night before her brother's wedding, Dorothy Wordsworth went to bed wearing the ring with which William would marry Mary Hutchinson. An account of this in her journal was later heavily deleted'. The very mystery of this manuscript exerts a powerful imaginative force for Harsent as for a number of the artists here.

Such evocative manuscripts, indeed, lay behind the curatorial thinking for the present exhibition as a whole, exploring as it does the relationship between words and things and the imaginative resonances of artistic materials: of forms, colours, sounds and performance. The poet Seamus Heaney, like Harsent, is published by Faber & Faber and the manuscript of Heaney's tribute poem 'Wordsworth's Skates' (2006) was inspired by a visit to the Wordsworth Museum where the author saw the pair of skates which the poet used on skating expeditions from Rydal Mount (see figure 31 on p.35). Heaney's poem, which was published in his collection *District and Circle* (2006), imagines the boys of Hawkshead Grammar School skating on a winter's day:

the reel of them on frozen Windermere
As he flashed from the clutch of earth along its curve
And left it scored.

Such pairing of poem and object inspired the curators of this exhibition to believe that poetry on Wordsworthian themes might indeed be hung on the walls of the Trust's Museum and Gallery, as well as being published in book form.

The material of words, words on the walls: the Wordsworths themselves sometimes lived around and with them, as those who

have visited the small bedroom in Dove Cottage will remember, hung as it is with pages from *The Times*. The Wordsworth Trust's Museum and the Jerwood Centre nearby also offer constant reminders of the visual power of the words of the Wordsworth, displaying, protecting, celebrating the manuscript as much as the printed page.

Manny Ling's experimental calligraphy, examples of which are also included here (see figure 23), are fine examples of such visual utterance, such words on the wall as well as on the page. The repurposing and reinterpretation of existing texts is central to all the great calligraphic traditions and, in his own practice, Ling embraces Eastern and Western elements in a deliberately intuitive manner. His methodology is an embodied and gestural one. It is also performative, as in recent works where he draws with molten glass on paper (see figure 24). Here, the scorched and burned marks on the paper become a material history, over which his calligraphic pen marks are later inscribed. Other works embrace old and new technologies, exploring the calligraphic — and gestural — dimensions of digital processes.

Ling visualizes the poetry of Wordsworth anew in works for this exhibition. The quintessential English poet is refigured here through East Asian materials and calligraphic perspectives as Chinese paper and inks are combined with a distinctly gestural process, one that embraces spontaneity, chance and accident (see pp.54–59). Yet, at the same time, and surprisingly perhaps, this complex material dialogue is also indebted to contemporary Photoshop techniques. In giving form to the words of other writers and poets included here, Ling's work sparks an echoing of many voices. These resonant echoes remind us again of the materiality of writing, and the ability of its forms to take us — viewers, readers and makers alike — to an experience of meaning that is, in many ways, beyond words.



Figure 23
Manny Ling
Extract from 'Derwent' by John Strachan (ll.3–4)
2013 Chinese Xuan paper, Sumi ink, Chinese brushes, metal leaves, Manuscript Chronicle nibs
36 x 23 cms



Figure 24
Manny Ling
'Life is the thing we all want' 2012
Words by Edward Johnston
Pyrographic calligraphy
40 x 40 cms



Figure 25
Robert Strachan and Bob Wass (*The Hive Collective*) 2011
'ReLive' sound/video installation
FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology)
Tate Liverpool 2011



Figure 26
The Hive Collective 2009
'A Question You Have Always Wanted to Ask' sound/video installation.
Tate Liverpool 2009

Where Ling's images give new shape to the poet's words, inviting us to immerse ourselves in their forms and colours, the audio-visual work of Robert Strachan and Sam Wiehl offers an echoing, sonorous response. The affective power of sound has been a key motif in Strachan and Wiehl's collaborative practice with Liverpool's Hive Collective over the past half-decade. On the one hand, this work has been much concerned with connections between sound, emotion and landscape (both rural and urban). On the other, it has also explored the implications of ubiquitous digital technologies upon individual and collective memory (see figures 25–28).

As Strachan and Wiehl remind us, Wordsworth's poetic landscapes encapsulate the fundamental sensory power of sound. They are aloud with textual noises and uncanny reverberation, animate echoes of nature, of humans and animals, interspersed with moments of silent poignancy. In such a way, his poetic voice speaks to us from before this digital age, before even the age of recorded sound, murmuring back to us again.

I heard ... solitary hills
Low breathings ... sounds
Of undistinguishable motion, steps
Almost as silent as the turf they trod

strange utterance ... loud dry wind
... through my ears!

Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1799), l. 30–65

Such textual descriptions of the soundings of man and nature, from Book 1 of Wordsworth's *Two-Part Prelude*, have been isolated here so as to form the underlying poetic score for *Undistinguishable Motion*, Strachan and Wiehl's newly-completed surround sound audio-visual installation (see pp.64–69). Found sounds and digital technologies are so layered that the listener may find unexpectedly familiar encounters within the mesh of reverberating noise. A series of echoes surrounds us, gradually building in intensity and shape to varying levels of intelligibility. Some end up in clearly recognisable or musical shapes, while others are of more indeterminate origin, at times unsettling or uncanny whilst others are more nostalgic and poignant.

John Strachan's poem 'Derwent' (see p.63) is another response to the opening lines of the first book of the 1799 *Prelude*, the work which has been the most influential in the current exhibition. In this case the remarkable portrait of the boy Wordsworth playing — if that is not too weak a word for his vigorous, symbolically-charged boyish pastimes — at the side of the Derwent in Cockermouth is inspiration:

Was it for this that I, a four year's child,
A naked Boy, among thy silent pools
Made one long bathing of a summer's day?
Basked in the sun, or plunged into thy streams,
Alternate, all a summer's day, or coursed
Over the sandy fields, and dashed the flowers
Of yellow grunsel, or when crag and hill,
The woods, and distant Skiddaw's lofty height
Were bronzed with a deep radiance, stood alone,
A naked Savage in the thunder-shower?

Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1799), l. 17–26



Figure 27
The Hive Collective 2012
'Unsettle' sound/video installation
Liverpool Biennial 2012



Figure 28
The Hive Collective 2008
'The Spectacular Suburb'
sound/video installation

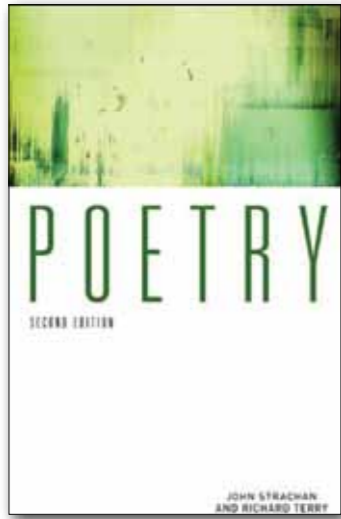


Figure 29
John Strachan/Richard Terry
Poetry
2011

Strachan's poem engages with the vision of the child at his play and with the notion of parental absence which has sometimes been seen as formative in the *Two-Part Prelude*.

Wordsworth's was a metapoetical vision; that is to say that he was much, indeed centrally, concerned with the writing of poetry itself and with the nature of creative activity, that 'ennobling interchange / Of action from without and from within', as he put it in the thirteenth book of the 1850 *Prelude*. That poem which everybody knows, or thinks they know, the 'Daffodils' from the *Poems in Two Volumes* of 1807, is typical in its attention to the nature of poetic creation in its great image of the flashing flowers: 'They flash upon that inward eye / Which is the bliss of solitude'. Strachan's 'Untitled' (see p.62), which begins 'Words are not like other creatures ...', is prompted by Wordsworth's poem and ends with a direct allusion to the Lake poet's own igneous metaphor. Strachan is a renowned scholar of Romanticism, but his interest in the form of verse and the way it is constructed is also seen in *Poetry* (see figure 29), written with Richard Terry (2000; 2011), a book which addresses both the study and the writing of poetry.

'Wordsworth at Castlerigg' (see p.61) is a response to Wordsworth's *Salisbury Plain* (1793-4), that remarkable and too often overlooked poem, a work related to both prehistory and the French Revolution, with its attention to Stonehenge and 'that powerful circle's reddening stones', to what Alan Liu once called 'Wordsworth's scene of violence', and to the Druidism of a 'sacrificial altar fed / With living men'. With verbal echoes of Wordsworth's narrative of Celtic Wiltshire and its druidic sacrifice, the poem imagines the stone carles — 'men' — of the north lakes host to a similar scene.

The final artist to contribute to the exhibition is the poet and fiction writer Tony Williams (see figure 30), who is undertaking a project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council entitled 'The Writer Walking the Dog: Creative Writing and Everyday Life' which researches the dual identities of walker and writer and the productive relationship between the two. Williams is much concerned with both the sociocultural positioning of the walking-writer and the function of walking in day-to-day writing practice. Clearly both of these topics draw heavily on the lives and practice of the Wordsworths. Indeed, to Williams, self-knowledge as both a walker and a writer cannot help but construct itself partly in relation to their examples. However, Williams's own writing practice utilises walking as a daily space for reflection, pause and composition, but differentiates it from high Romantic notions of inspiration: to him, typically, the landscape he walks through every day, paradoxically, becomes invisible, a blank space for creative thinking.

That said, Williams has written of the landscape which surrounds him on his peripatetic musings that 'I do sometimes pay attention, though'. The poems presented here represent one way in which he has taken walking itself as the direct subject of his creative work. 'The Path that Follows the Traveller' (see p.77) imagines Wordsworth's thought and life in relation to his walking. With an underlying pulse of blank verse, the immediate model for the argument and pace of the poem is Derek Walcott's 'Sea Canes' (1976), a poem which concerns walking, though, of course, one but little related to Wordsworth.

The valorization of the Lake District countryside by William and Dorothy Wordsworth and others provides an opportunity for Williams to think about his own home landscape, Matlock in Derbyshire. The poet writes of his own poem 'Derwent' (p.74) that 'the town's river

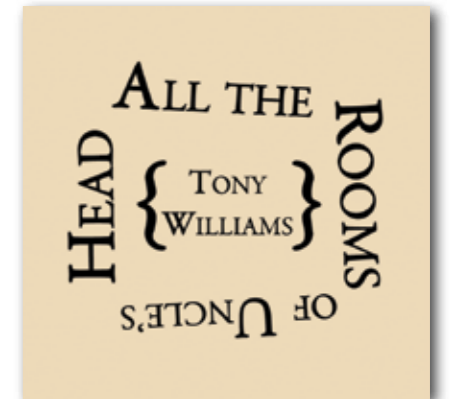


Figure 30
Tony Williams
All the Rooms of Uncle's Head
2011

shares its names with the Cumbrian Derwent, and in that poem of that title I wanted to explore ideas of plurality, repetition and mortality, and in particular the strange sensation of discovering as I grew older that the intense identifications I felt with very specific places were shared, ultimately, with no one’.

We will also let Williams speak for himself regarding his final poem, ‘The Rural Citizen’ (p.79):

It’s very easy for modern leisure walkers — or indeed writer-walkers — to repeat Wordsworth’s routes or writing practice, and feel they are reproducing his experiences in some degree. In ‘The Rural Citizen’ I wanted to think about the legal and cultural conditions in which we walk through landscapes, the extent to which we are allowed or demand to do so. It’s very easy to theorise the city as a difficult and dynamic modern location, and the countryside as a privileged, traditional or simple one; but the idea of the city can’t be bound in by walls, and even a herd of cows blocking a five-bar gate can be politically charged.

Wordsworth and his thought still shape the ‘cultural conditions in which we walk through landscapes’, in the activities of the Wordsworth Trust, now in one of the most vibrant periods of its history, in the wider work of the National Trust (founded in large part by that indefatigable Wordsworthian Canon H. D. Rawnsley), and in the very nature and geography of the Lake District National Park. In like manner, the poet continues to occupy a space near the centre of

modern literary studies. Since the 1970s and the recovery of the critical reputation of the Romantic poets, Wordsworth has been interpreted in many different ways: as the philosophical poet whose work fascinated the Yale School and the deconstructionists, as a poet of Revolution, as the great but politically reactionary poet of the New Historicist imagination, as the first ecological poet. And it must also not be forgotten that Wordsworth continues — as here — to prompt artistic creation in several cultural forms. Tony Williams’s engagement with Wordsworth is but one of the manifold artists’ responses to the poet and to his sister in this exhibition.



Figure 31 Wordsworth’s Skates (see p.28) (Courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust)

≈ THE ARTISTS ≈

Tim Brennan

Mike Collier

David Harsent

Manny Ling

John Strachan

Robert Strachan &

Sam Wiehl

Brian Thompson

Tony Williams



TIM BRENNAN

iAmbic Pedometer revolves around the report of Wordsworth's mode of composition in which he would walk and utter aloud for hours on end. The work is an iPhone video of a walk made by the artist from his home in Sunderland. Moving through inner city, suburban and open spaces, Brennan's mumblings shift from semi-cogent announcement to that of the concrete poem. They collide Kurt Schwitter's 'ur poetry' (another Cumbrian resident) with that of the pentameter. The artist sees this fusion as proposing Wordsworth's early writing mode as bearing a relation to that of the Shaman, who, once induced into a separate reality, may then speak in a variety of tongues to provide insight.

Ashbrooke Tempel is a suite of four photographs that further distil the above into emblematic form: the walking stick ('Radical Antiquariansim'), a field of dream ('Red Meadow'), the cloud ('Memory') and the church at sunset ('Slight Return').

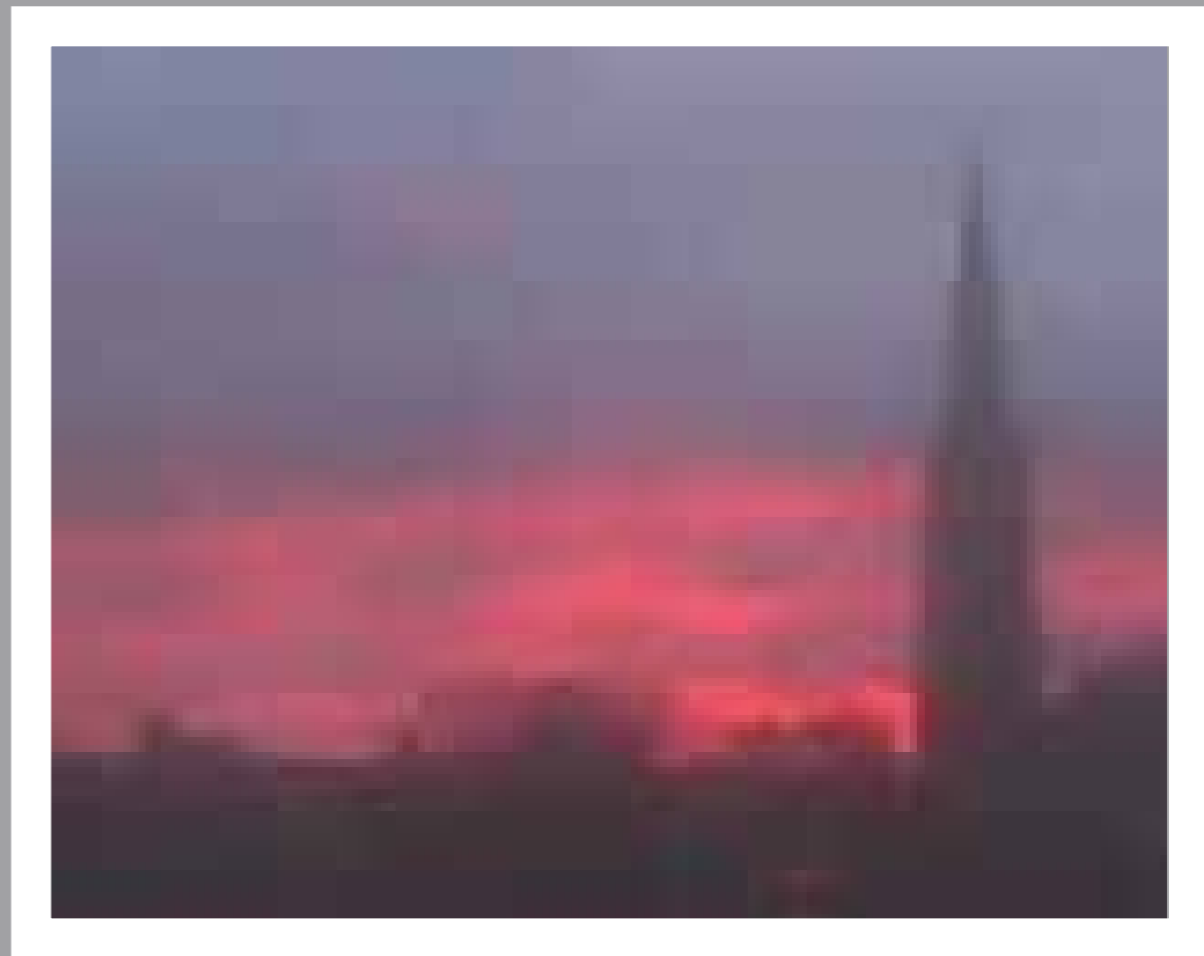
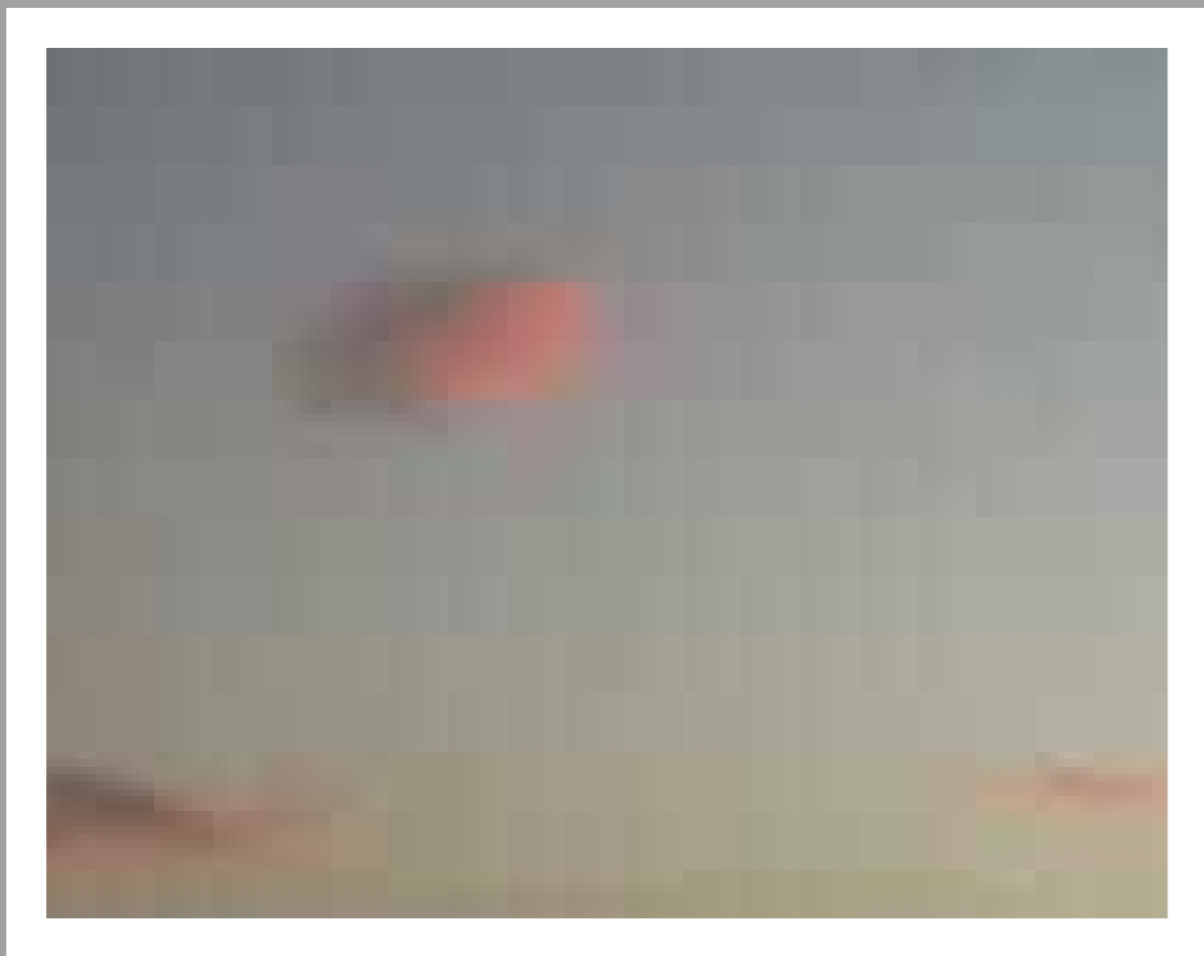
TIM BRENNAN



*Tim Brennan
Ashbrooke Tempel:
Radical Antiquarianism
2013*



*Tim Brennan
Ashbrooke Tempel: Red Meadow
2013*



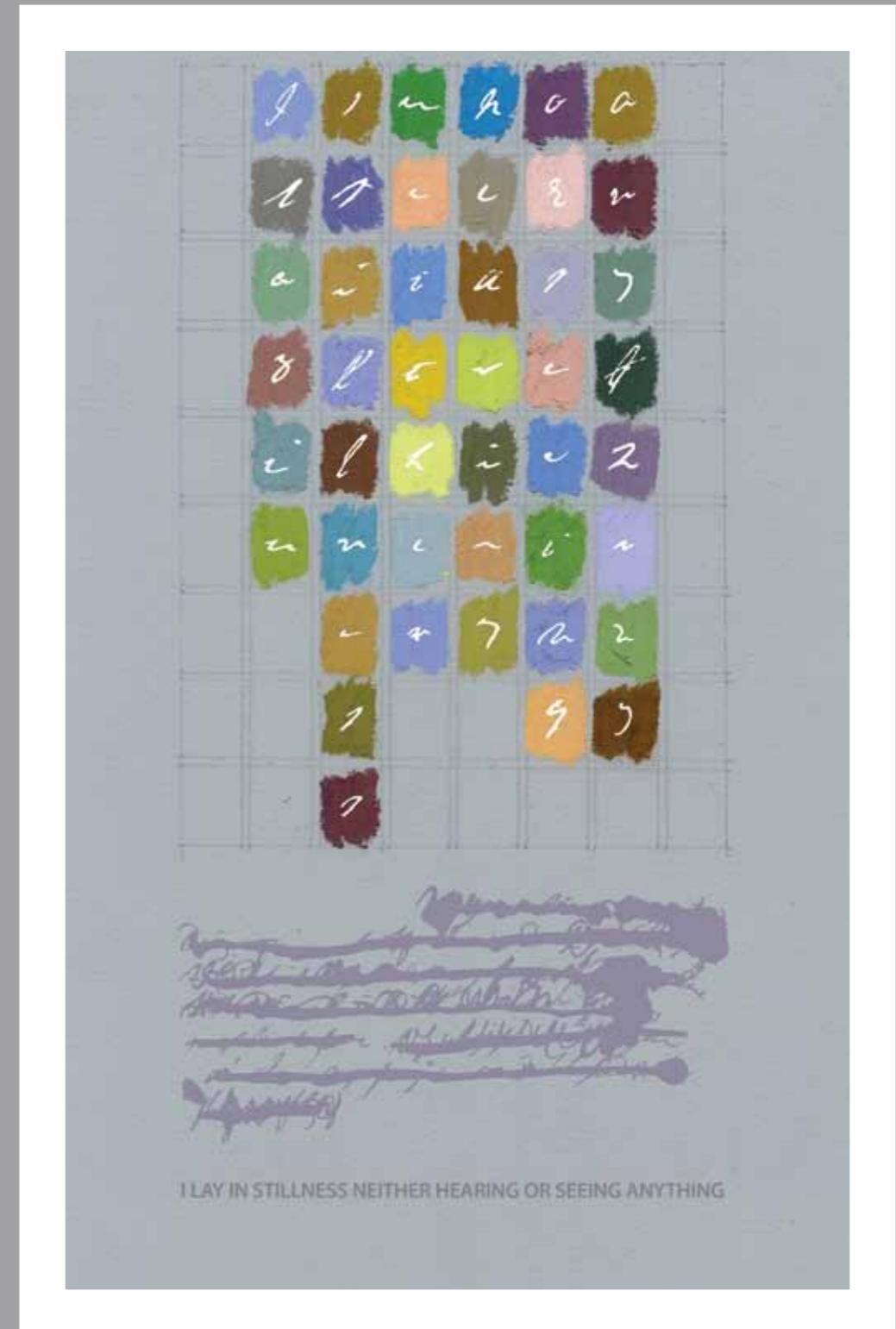
MIKE COLLIER

The prints on pages 43 & 45 relate to the famous entry in Dorothy Wordsworth's journal where she describes her response to events between Tuesday 26 July (actually 27) and 8 October 1802 and in particular (on this specific page) of her feelings on the morning of her brother William's wedding on 4 October 1802. *The Ring* (p.43) focuses firstly on the parts of the text we can see (Dorothy says that she 'lay in stillness, neither hearing or seeing anything'), and secondly on the text which has been erased. McKay and Strachan explain in more detail how this print was made and the questions it asks (see their essay, p.24 of this publication).

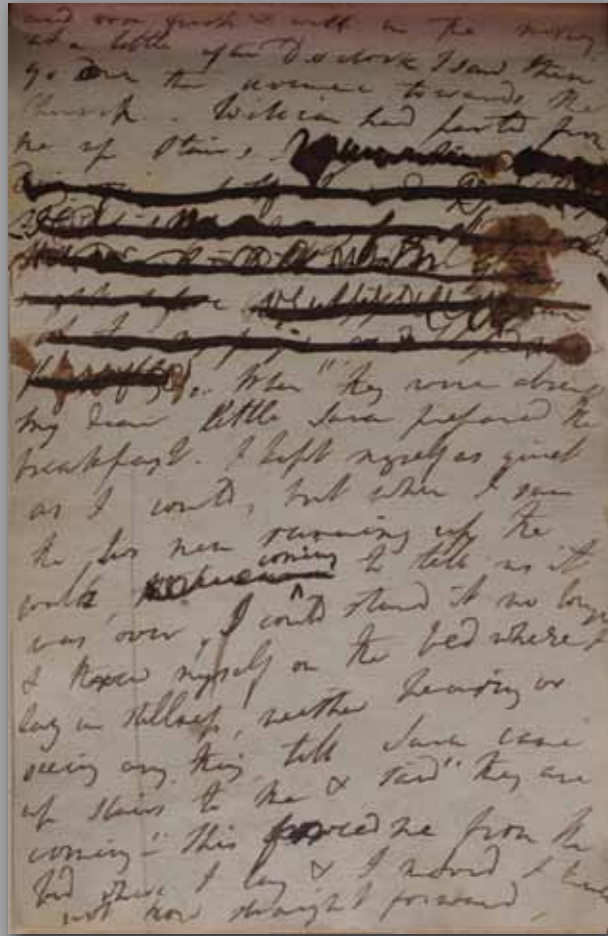
The colours used in *The Ring* express the complex nature of this diary entry and in two other prints illustrated here, *The Ring (1)* and *The Ring (2)* (p.45), Collier has captured something of this ambiguity, this time working spontaneously and directly with pastels over a printed image of the manuscript page.

The Ancient Brotherhood of Mountains: there was a loud uproar in the hills was inspired by a reading of William Wordsworth's 'To Joanna' from *Poems on the Naming of Places* (and in particular the excerpt printed on p.46). In it, Wordsworth refers to the hills as a 'brotherhood of ancient mountains' and Collier's use of Old Norse and Old English names (plus the combination of earthy and airy colours along with a tactile use of pigment) implies a perception of time, weight, rock and soil as well as a sense of air and distance, whilst the circular form of the text suggests the (imagined) echoes and sounds of these hills calling to each other.

Opposite page:
Mike Collier
The Ring 2012
Digital Print, 40 x 35 cms
(produced in collaboration with Emma Tominey)
(Courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust)



MIKE COLLIER



(I slept a good deal of the night) ... and rose fresh and well in the morning - at a little after 8 o'clock I saw them go down the avenue towards the Church. William had parted from me upstairs. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. When they were absent my dear little Sara prepared the breakfast. I kept myself as quiet as I could, but when I saw the two men running up the walk, coming to tell us it was over, I could stand it no longer & threw myself on the bed where I lay in stillness neither hearing or seeing anything till Sara came upstairs to me & said 'They are coming'. This forced me from the bed where I lay & I moved I knew not how straight forward ... (faster than my strength could carry me)



Mike Collier
 The Ring (1) and The Ring (2) 2012
 (From Dorothy Wordsworth's journal entry dated Tuesday 26th July (actually the 27th) covering the period from then until 8th October 1802)
 2 x Digital Prints 18 x 29cms

From Dorothy Wordsworth's journal entry dated Tuesday 26th July (actually the 27th) covering the period from then until 8th October 1802 (Courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust)

MIKE COLLIER

Poems on the Naming of Places

An excerpt from 'To Joanna'

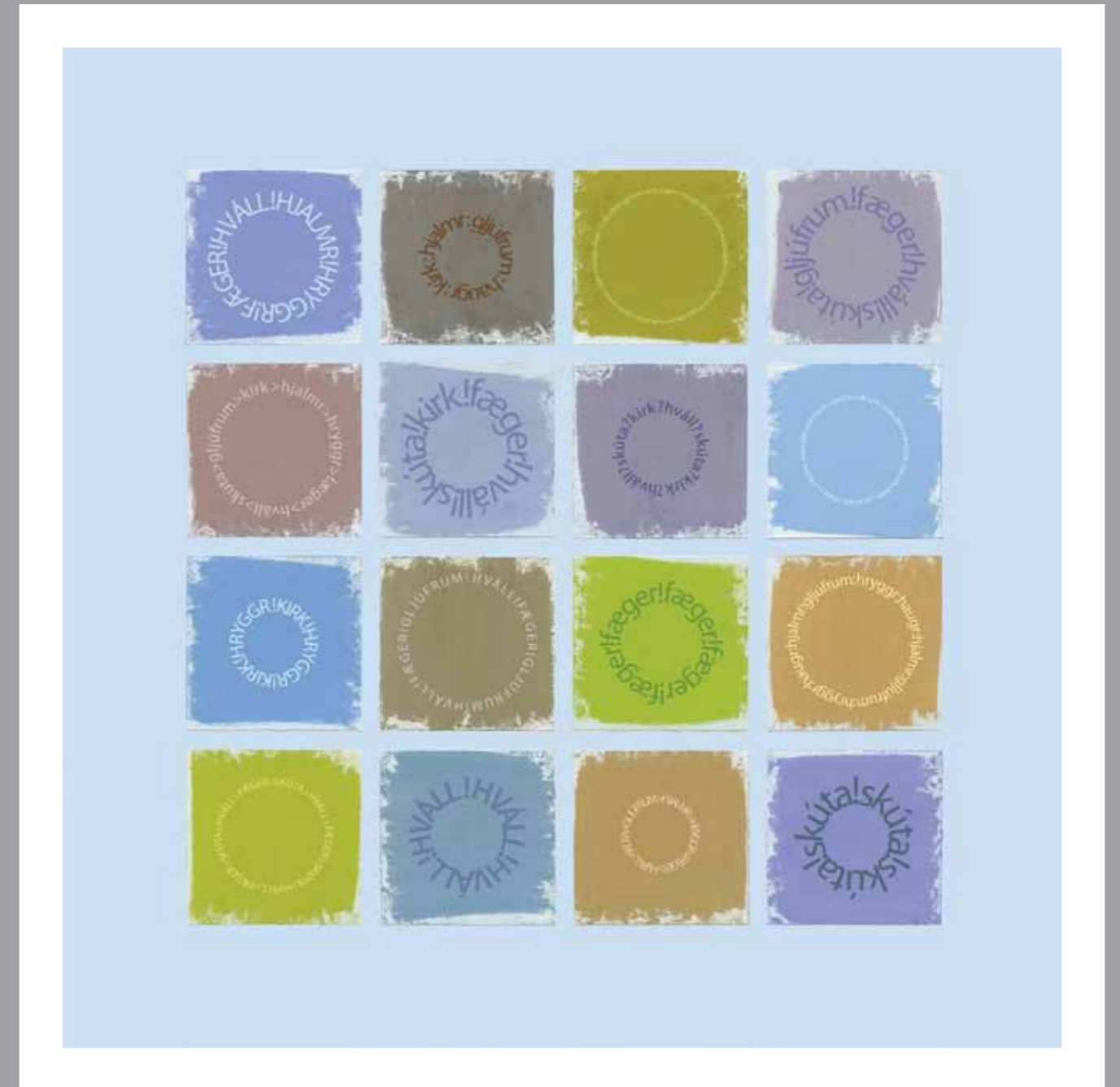
... Joanna, looking in my eyes, beheld
 That ravishment of mine, and laughed aloud,
 The Rock, like something starting from a sleep,
 Took up the Lady's voice, and laughed again;
 That ancient Woman seated on Helm-crag
 Was ready with her cavern; Hammar-scar,
 And the tall Steep of Silver-how, sent forth
 A noise of laughter; southern Loughrigg heard,
 And Fairfield answered with a mountain tone;
 Helvellyn far into the clear blue sky
 Carried the Lady's voice, — old Skiddaw blew
 His speaking-trumpet; — back out of the clouds
 Of Glaramara southward came the voice;
 And Kirkstone tossed it from his misty head.
 — Now whether (said I to our cordial Friend,
 Who in the hey-day of astonishment
 Smiled in my face) this were in simple truth
 A work accomplished by the brotherhood
 Of ancient mountains, or my ear was touched
 With dreams and visionary impulses
 To me alone imparted, sure I am
 That there was a loud uproar in the hills.
 And while we both were listening, to my side
 The fair Joanna drew, as if she wished
 To shelter from some object of her fear.

Derivations

Helm Cragg	hjalnr: ON — helmet or protection
Loughrigg	hryggr ON — ridge
Fairfield	fæger: OE — fair, lovely
Helvellyn	hváll: ON — hill
Skiddaw	skúta: ON — to jut
Glaramara	gljúfrum: PNCumb (at the ravines)
Kirkstonekirk:	OS — church mountain
Silver How	haugr: ON (?) — silver hill

(ON = Old Norse; OE = Old English; OS = Ordnance Survey
 and PNCumb is a reference to *The Place Names of Cumberland*
 (ed. A. M. Armstrong; A. Mawer, F. M. Stenton & Bruce
 Dickins. 1950–2)

Opposite page:
 Mike Collier
The Ancient Brotherhood of Mountains:
there was a loud uproar in the hills 2012
 (From *To Joanna, Poems on the Naming of Places*)
 Digital Print 120 x 120 cms
 (produced in collaboration with Emma Tominey)



DAVID HARSENT

'I gave him the wedding ring ...'

There's uncertainty over whether or not it was Dorothy Wordsworth who deleted those famous (infamous) lines. In the act of writing — pen to page — she was talking to herself, but there's a sense in which all journals are written to be read; or, perhaps, not with the intention that they should be read, so much as the almost-welcome risk that they might be. Dorothy writes, often, as someone noting the day-to-day; but at other times talks of love so without guile or tact that her emotions betray her. When I first saw the page, I imagined the shock of recognition she must have felt when she re-read that passage after the event. *'I took it from my forefinger where I had worn it the whole of the night before ...'* If it wasn't Dorothy who struck out those words, she was deliberately running the risk of disclosure; but if it was her pen, heavy with ink, that scored the page, how much greater a risk she took in that dark emphasis.

“That the pain starts on the feminine side behind the eye.” ∞

from 'The Literal Body' by Lavinia Greenlaw

DAVID HARSENT

On the night before her brother's wedding, Dorothy Wordsworth went to bed wearing the ring with which William would marry Mary Hutchinson. An account of this in her journal was later heavily deleted.

Effaced

A life beyond the life and known to no one, peopled by ghosts
who can step up to be fleshed if you choose, or be held back,

can be dreamwork, can walk straight in, the invited guests
you welcome and fear. You speak for them, you give them what they lack,

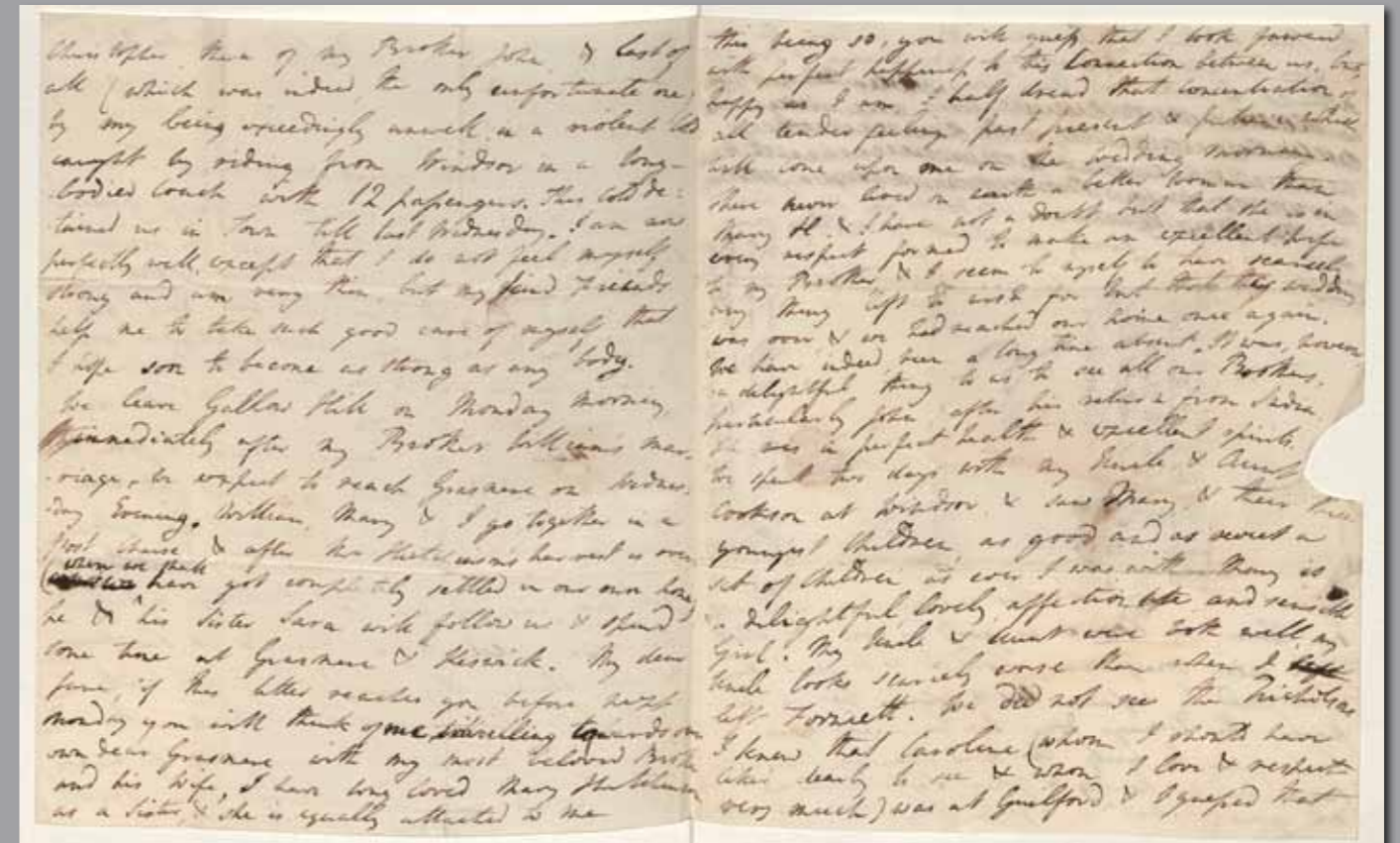
you note what can't be said, you feel them out, keep track
of their night-lives, night-moves, hallways, hidden rooms,

all of which delights you, moving among them, shrouded in black,
widowed without being wed, feeding the fire, if you want to, with reams

of work half-done and left to grow in silence, that precious stack curling
and catching — last love, last light — as you burn whatever rhymes.

DAVID HARSENT

“I have long loved Mary Hutchinson as a Sister, and she is equally attached to me this being so, you will guess that I look forward with perfect happiness to this Connection between us, but, happy as I am, I half dread that concentration of all tender feelings, past, present and future which will come upon me on the wedding morning. There never lived on earth a better woman than Mary H. and I have not a doubt but that she is in every respect formed to make an excellent wife to my Brother, and I seem to myself to have scarcely any thing left to wish for but that the wedding was over, and we had reached our home once again.”



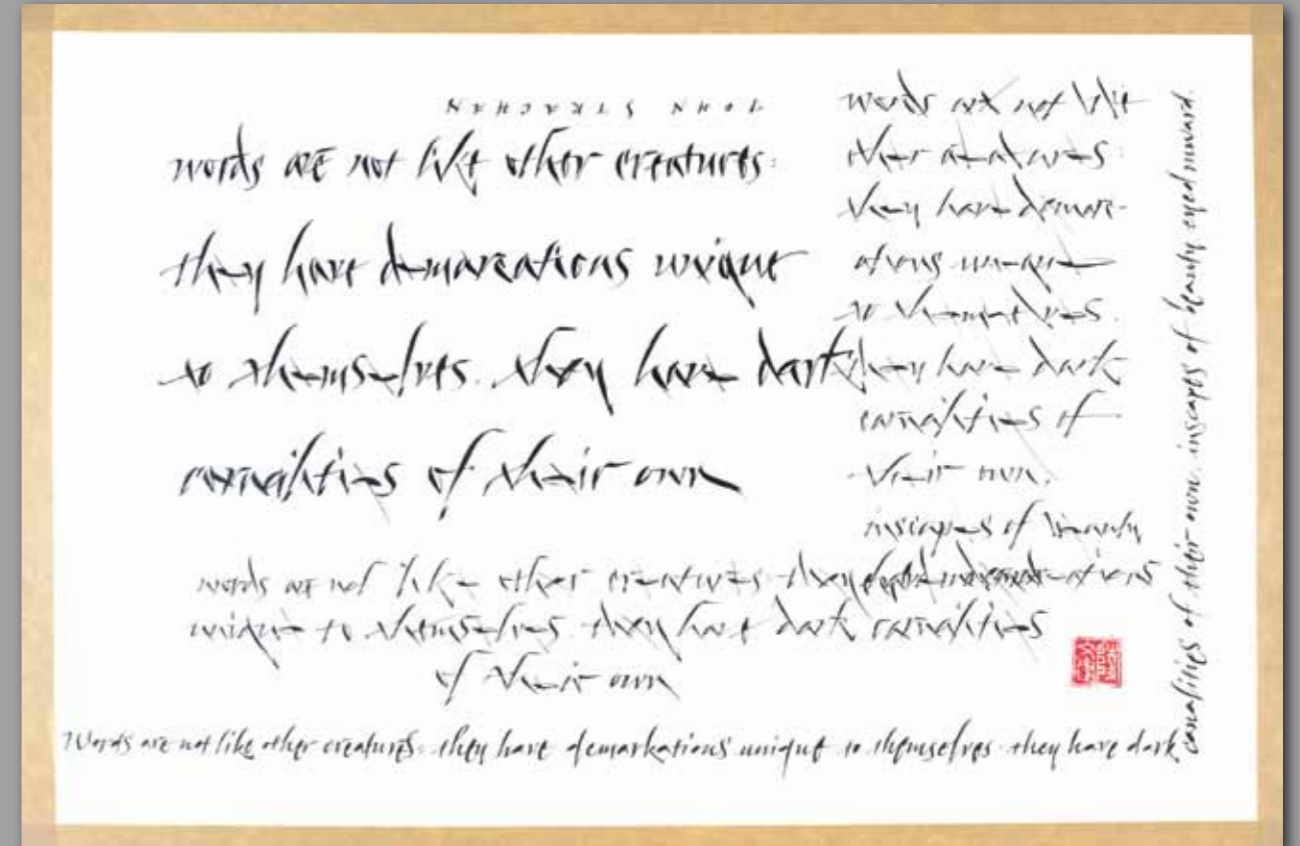
Extract from a letter by Dorothy Wordsworth to Jane Marshall
29 September 1802, written prior to William Wordsworth's marriage to Mary
(Courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust)

MANNY LING

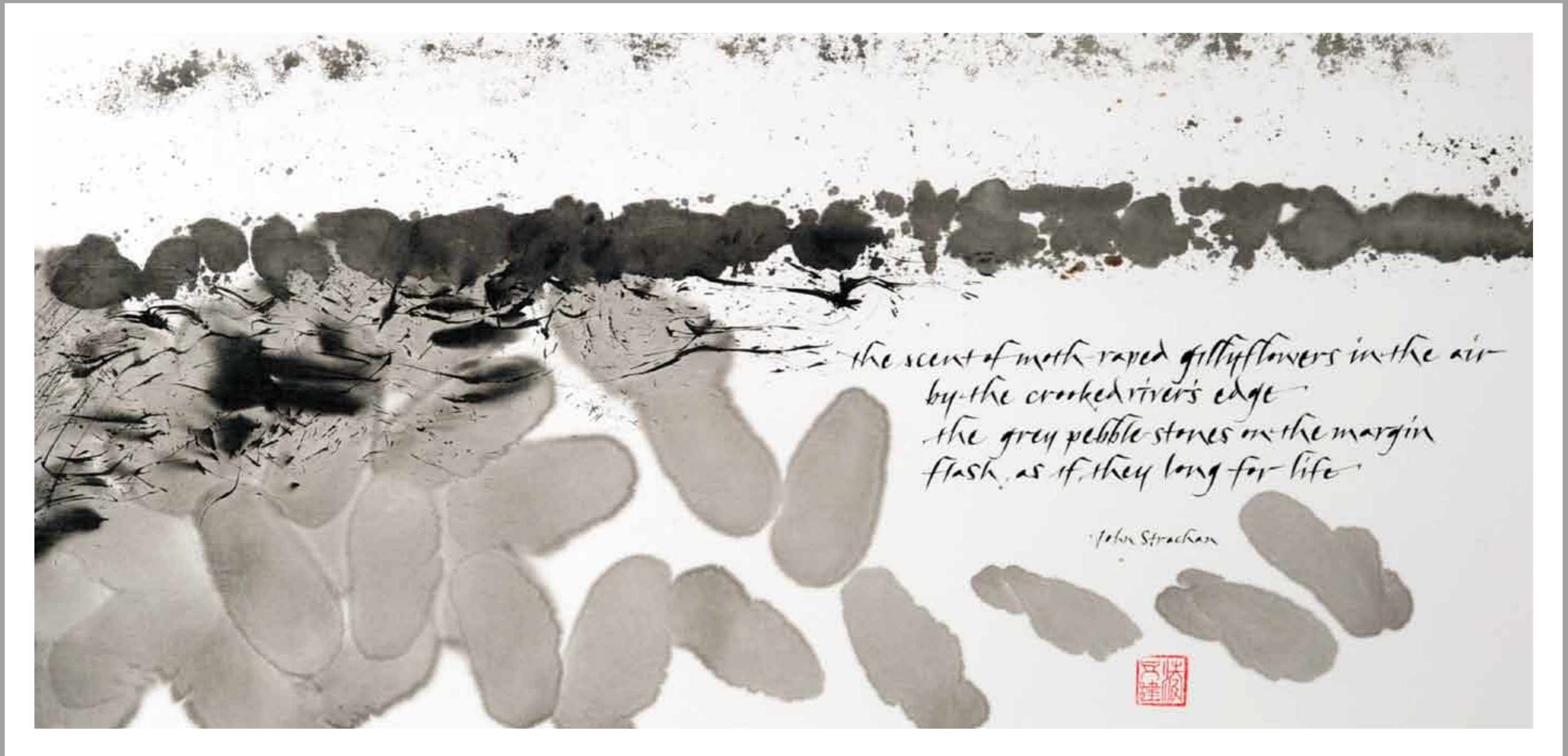
Instead of starting with Wordsworth's poetry, Manny Ling began with John Strachan's 'Untitled' (see p.62) — an insightful poem about both the simple and the complex nature of letters and words. As a calligrapher, he was intrigued by Strachan's description — "words are not like other creatures: they have demarcations unique to themselves". These lines inspired Ling to develop a unique calligraphic script especially for this exhibition (see p.55 opposite).

Ling then wanted to draw parallels and explore connections between Wordsworth's and Strachan's poetry and his own approaches to calligraphy (see pp.56 & 59). He suggests that both poets share similar Oriental perspectives to the landscape as he himself does. Their words have a cinematic quality and a sensibility that transports him into *their* landscapes from within looking out, rather than from the outside looking in. This realization has enabled Ling to create a body of work that uses a mix of Chinese and Western approaches, materials and tools.

Ling believes that a poet transcribes his inner being through words and, as a calligrapher, he tries to transcribe the poet's words into life. In this body of work, he wants the viewer to look beyond the calligraphy — to read the words transcribed — and he hopes that through this process, these letters and words will live on.

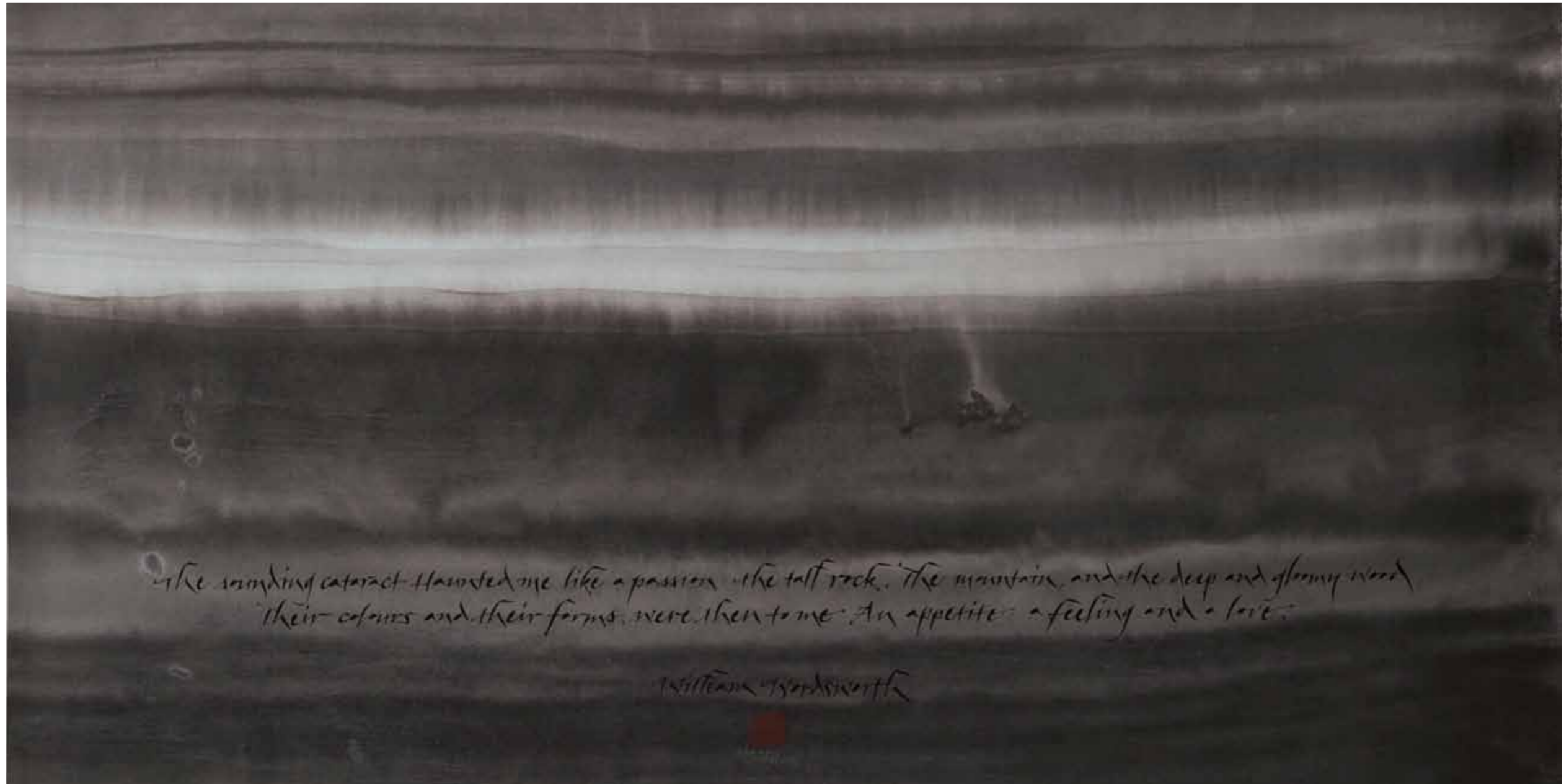


Manny Ling
 'Untitled' by John Strachan
 2013 22.5 x 34.5 cms
 Calligraphy, Sumi ink and Manuscript Chronicle nibs



Manny Ling
Extract from 'Derwent' by John Strachan (ll. 3-6)
2013 31 x 66 cms
Calligraphy, Chinese Xuan paper, Sumi ink, Chinese brushes and Manuscript Chronicle nibs

MANNY LING



Manny Ling
'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour'. (ll. 77-81) by William Wordsworth 2013 31 x 62 cms
Calligraphy, Chinese Xuan paper, Sumi ink, Chinese brushes and Manuscript Chronicle nibs
(Courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust)

JOHN STRACHAN

John Strachan's poem 'Derwent' offers another response to the opening of the first book of the 1799 *Prelude*, engaging with Wordsworth's vision of himself as a child at Cockermouth — 'A naked Savage in the thunder-shower'. 'Wordsworth at Castlerigg' is a response to Wordsworth's *Salisbury Plain* (1793-4), that remarkable and too often overlooked poem. With verbal echoes of Wordsworth's narrative of Celtic Wiltshire and its druidic sacrifice, the poem imagines the stone carles — 'men' — of the North Lakes host to a similar scene.

Wordsworth was much concerned with the writing of poetry itself and with the nature of creative activity. The famous 'Daffodils' from the *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807) is typical in its attention to the nature of poetic creation in its great image of the flowers which 'flash upon that inward eye / Which is the bliss of solitude'. Strachan's 'Untitled' is prompted by Wordsworth's poem and directly alludes to it.



Castlerigg Stone Circle (Courtesy of freefoto.com)

Wordsworth at Castlerigg

The carles loose-looped in pagan austerity,
They seem no idle scattering to him.
The men, white-robed, long gone,
But the high one's long-rotted mouth,
Its voice eloquent of death and life
Still opens in that edgeway shape.
This is the oldest of songs, new-made,
Free of manufacture's taint, slow, deliberate.

The poet lies, on the cold heath-grass,
The night-fire mounting to the clouds.
He sees the living men, the sacrificial altar,
Bloodied arms and dead-trailed flesh.
And here the secrets known only
To these hills are turned upon him
And here the nature of the day
Revealed, the desert and the dismal red.

Untitled

words are not like other creatures:
they have demarcations unique
to themselves. they have dark
carnalities of their own,
inscapes of beauty,
eyed inward.

Derwent

the skulking whitethroats push deeper into the nettles
but his switch is cast by.

the scent of moth-raped gillyflowers in the air
by the crooked river's edge.

the grey pebble-stones on the margin
flash, as if they long for life.

the rod - his scarce-word father's - trails,
safe-stabbed in earth.

past his savage-naked feet, a group of fish,
hot-eyed, silver-sided, dart

fleeing from the stone loach, dark patriarch
uprisen, fear-fostering.

co-extensive with them all, the river's
shadow hidden in his eyes,

he plunges, arm-cleaved through skin-surface,
and spreads, and sinks, and rises.

a 'draggled nosegay, bright-wound for his mother,
left at the water's side.

ROBERT STRACHAN & SAM WIEHL

Undistinguishable Motion

Robert Strachan, Sam Wiehl (Hive Collective)

Wordsworth's is an attuned ear. His poetic voice is alive to the nuances of sound. His landscapes are sonically reverberant, aloud with noises. Mountains sound, the forces of nature provide uncanny reverberations. Distinctions between real and imagined noises are confused. Animal cries, of uncertain origin, take on a supernatural, phantasmagorical quality. The intrusive din of humans fills the soundscape, punctuated by moments of silent poignancy. Sonic echoes provoke psychological recollections; reflections on a life lived, redolent with emotion.

Undistinguishable Motion isolates Wordsworth's descriptions of sound in Book 1 of *The Prelude* and employs them as a poetic score, the inspiration for a new sonic departure. Drawing from the textual descriptions of the soundings of man and nature, the installation explores intersections between memory, sound and the physical environment to create a resonant landscape. Using found sounds and digital technologies, it challenges the listener to discern the familiar within the redoubled layers of reverberating noise, to listen to the textual sonorities growing from and returning back to silence.

I heard ... solitary hills
Low breathing ... sounds
Of undistinguishable motion, steps
Almost as silent as the turf they trod

strange utterance ... loud dry wind
... through my ears!

... the immortal spirit grows
Like harmony in music; there is a dark
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements ...

The voice
Of mountain echoes ...

Silent lake
Silent water
Grandeur in the beating of the heart

All shod with steel,
We hissed along the polished ice ...
... the resounding horn
... loud chiming and the hounded hare
... with the din

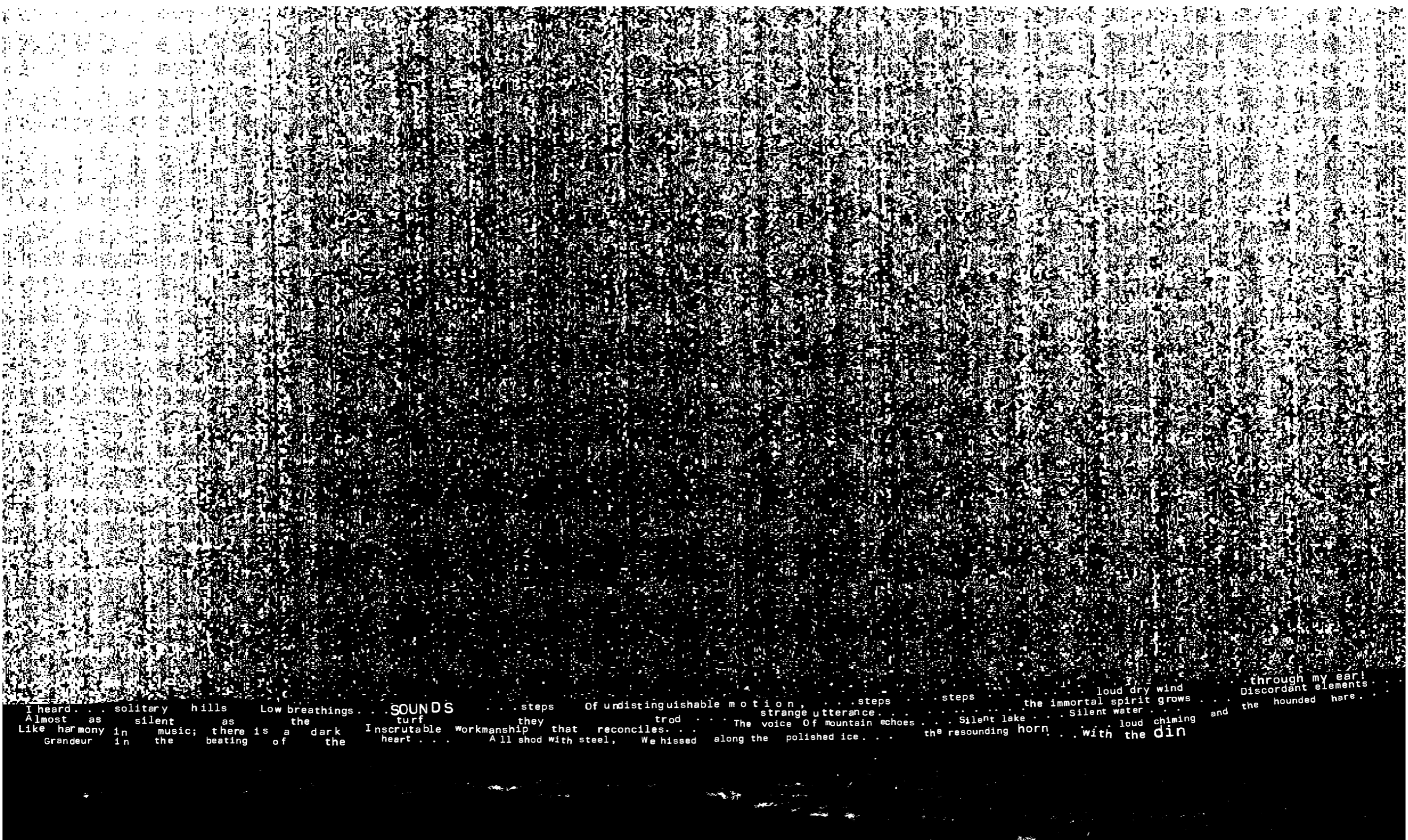
Smitten, the precipices rang aloud;
The leafless trees and every icy crag
Tinkled like iron; while far distant hills
Into the tumult sent an alien sound
Of melancholy not unnoticed.

... from the uproar I retired
Into a silent bay.
Behind me did they stretch in solemn train,
Feeble and feebler, and I stood and watched
Till all was tranquil as a dreamless sleep.

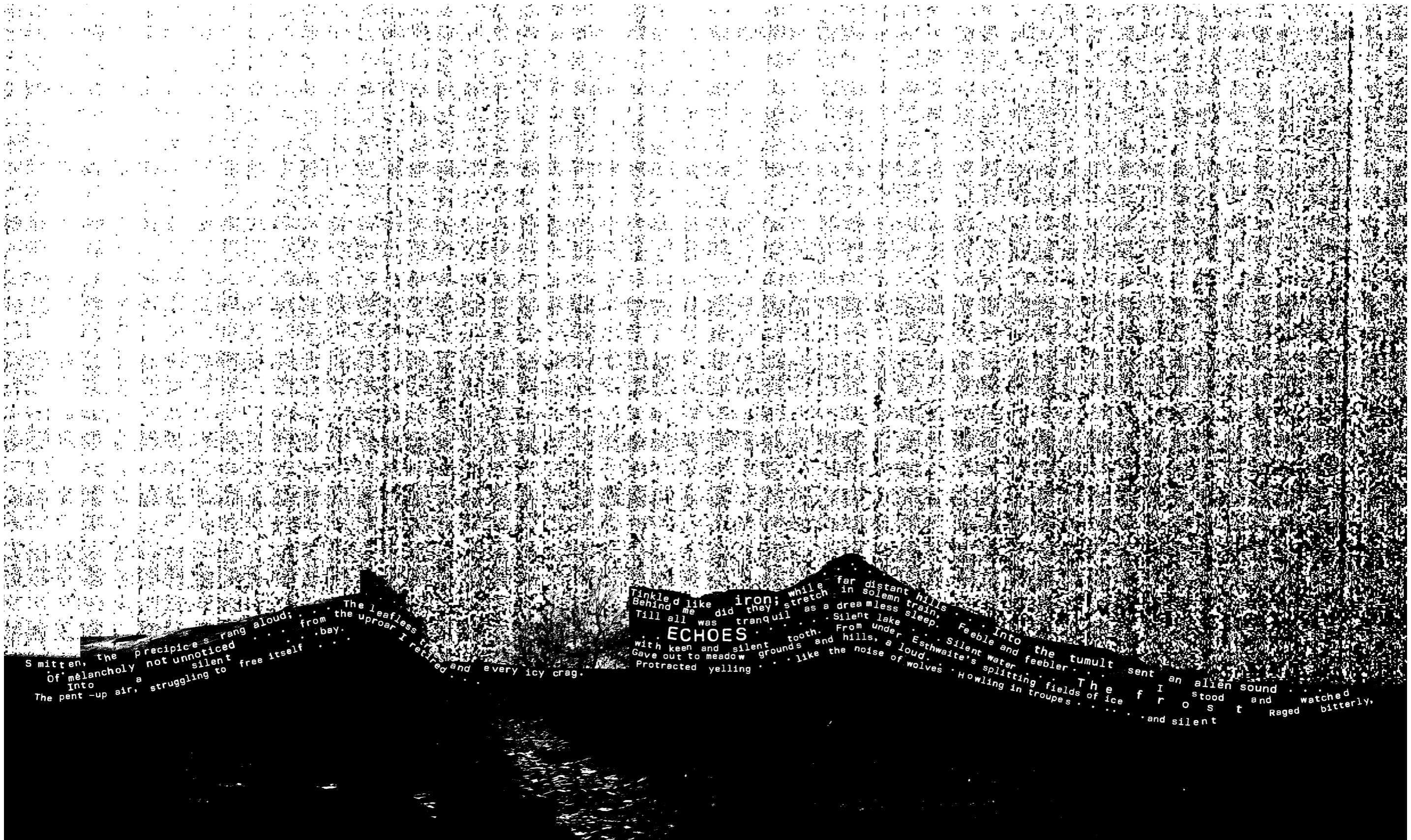
... echoes ...
Silent lake
Silent water

The frost
Raged bitterly, with keen and silent tooth.
From under Esthwaite's splitting fields of ice
The pent-up air, struggling to free itself,
Gave out to meadow grounds and hills, a loud
Protracted yelling like the noise of wolves
Howling in troupes ...

... and silent ...



I heard . . . solitary hills Low breathings . . . **SOUNDS** . . . steps Of undistinguishable motion, steps steps the immortal spirit grows through my ear!
Almost as silent as the turf they trod strange utterance. Discordant elements
Like harmony in music; there is a dark Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles. The voice Of mountain echoes. Silent lake Silent water and the hounded hare
Grandeur in the beating of the heart . . . All shod with steel, We hissed along the polished ice. . . the resounding horn . . . with the loud chiming and the **din**



S mitted, the precipices rang aloud; The leafless trees
Of melancholy not unnoticed from the uproar I retired and every icy crag.
Into a silent bay.
The pent-up air, struggling to free itself
Tinkled like iron; while far distant hills
Behind me did they stretch in solemn train,
Till all was tranquil as a dreamless sleep.
Silent lake
From under Esthwaite's splitting fields of ice
with keen and silent tooth. Feeble and the tumult sent an alien sound
Gave out to meadow grounds and hills, a loud. Silent water feebler
Protracted yelling like the noise of wolves Howling in troupes
The frost and watched
and silent Raged bitterly,

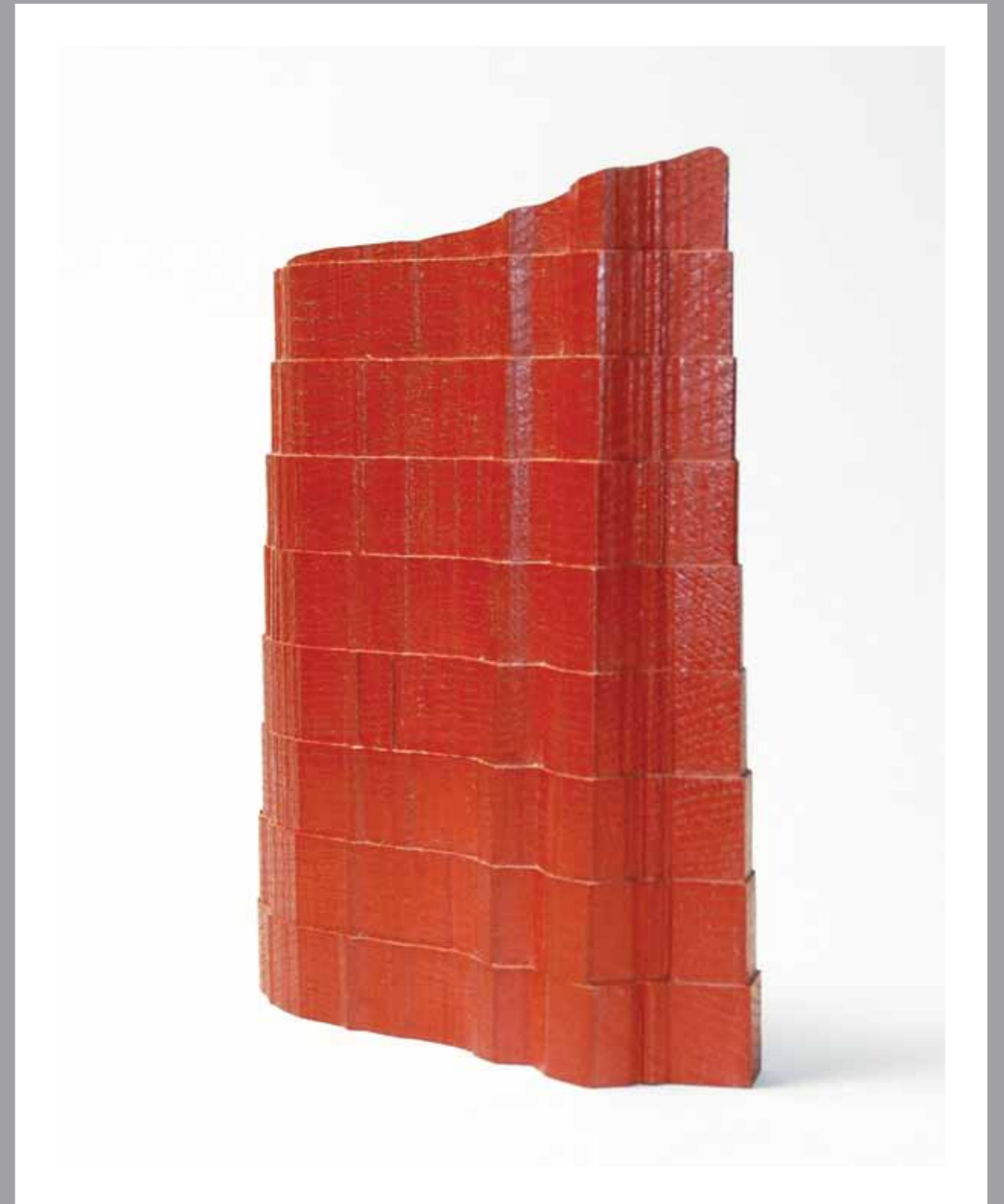
ECHOES

BRIAN THOMPSON

Brian Thompson's sculptures explore the landscape made famous by Wordsworth. He makes parallels in the way a sculptor, like a poet, might find inspiration in the natural world. On his walks he looks for ways of revealing and sharing something of his experience of landscape and its places through a visual artist's language of scale, form, material and colour.

He is interested in how and why paths are formed over many generations. Thompson's walks, recorded through GPS tracking or tracings from maps and aerial photographs, become the 'line' of the walks and the starting point of the sculptures and prints. These 'lines' are cut usually by hand and often in wood, with each layer becoming the template for the succeeding layer. Through small increments of size the sculptures evolve, tapering downward from top to base, incorporating errors and corrections; marking layer upon layer, in geological fashion, the history of their making. Sometimes these become 'patterns' for fabrication in materials and colours directly relevant to the location or simply have 'come to mind' when he makes the walks.

The sculptures serve as diaries, mementos and sometimes trophies. They reveal something of the topography of the world and tell us something about how we come to know and navigate.



*Brian Thompson Grasmere Church to Easedale Tarn 2012
Painted Oak (red oxide) 21.4 x 16.5 x 4.5 cms*

BRIAN THOMPSON



Brian Thompson
Around Easedale Tarn 2012
Painted Oak (raw sienna)
21.4 x 5.0 x 4.0 cms



Brian Thompson
Easedale Walk 2012
Charred Oak
16.4 x 10.0 x 3.0 cms

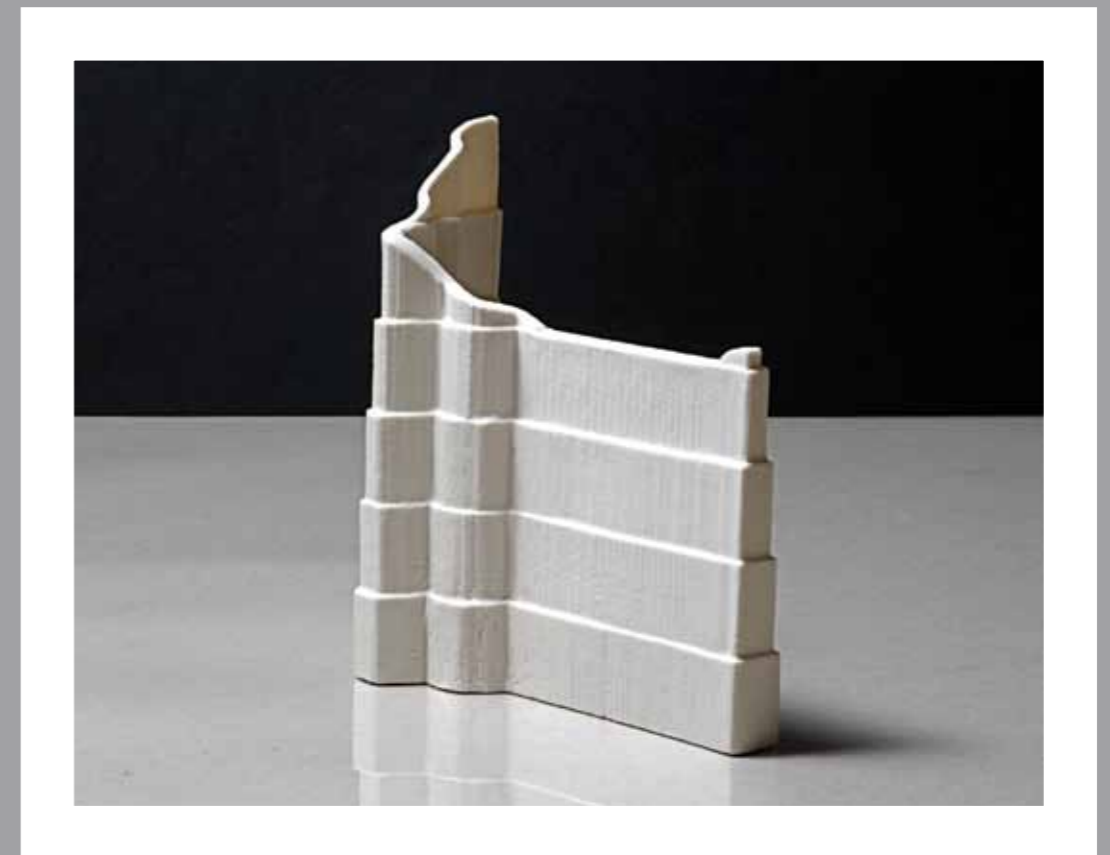
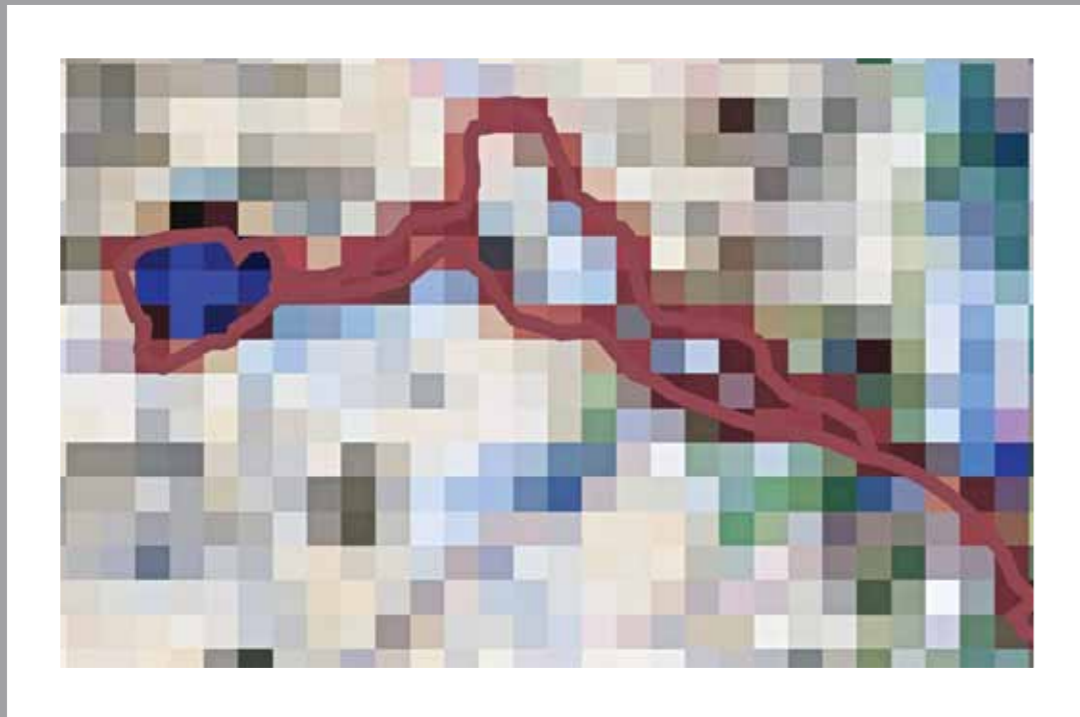


Brian Thompson
Grasmere Round 2012
Graphite and Print on Wood
20.0 x 19.0 x 13.2 cms



Brian Thompson
Along Loughrigg Terrace 2012
Elm
23.4 x 12.5 x 6.0 cms

BRIAN THOMPSON



TONY WILLIAMS

Walking and writing are both activities Tony Williams undertakes every day. His current research project, funded by the AHRC, asks how everyday activities like dog-walking might shape the writing he produces. Tony asks himself: 'Who am I when I walk the dogs, and how is this reflected in the writing I produce? How do I use dog-walking as an instrument of my writing practice?'

In answering these questions Tony Williams has been aware that when he walks and writes, he is following in Wordsworth's footsteps. The poems presented here represent different ways the poet has engaged with walking, landscape, and Wordsworth's legacy. 'The Rural Citizen' considers how the walker is not a neutral figure but engages with social and political debates. 'Derwent' reflects on Wordsworth's affection for the river in *The Prelude* and Tony Williams's affection for the river of that name in his own childhood home in Derbyshire. 'The Path that Follows the Traveller' is a kind of elegy for Wordsworth, the archetypal poet-in-movement.

The Path that Follows the Traveller

'It is not my intention to be illiberal'
— Wordsworth, 'Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff'

The rain is proof. The rain offers
baptism to those who would fulfil
their responsibilities as gardeners, as dog-walkers,
as students of the terms on which one man
might cross the land without salary or retinue.

Only when your felt hat melts, when you taste
salt on the face's shore, and a thorn wind,
do horizons sink behind the mist
to take in continents. I mean cold solitude
taught you togetherness. And the rain grew your beans,
each brown brain soaked in northwesterlies
until pod parliaments of foetuses
began to greenly form and wait.

In the rain you grew old. Let those who preen
and pine to die immaculate
mock your tiredness,
your bracken beaten down by rain recanting.
You turned to firesides and silk to soothe
your shrivelled old been in the rain too long
fingertips. To have stayed where you were
was against Nature.

All travelling goes somewhere, out of the sublime
view, out of the valley of light, towards the grave,
towards the glass grave of fame
and so much water that even
the umbilical cord of your signature risks
dissolution like the stone of your beloved hills.
It is enough that you passed through,
snapping umbellifers as you went, to show the way,
leaving little lakes in the prints of your boots.

Derwent

'the fairest of all rivers'
– Wordsworth, *The Prelude*

They are not one, the river in the crook
of my elbow and in yours. The shallows
are not, the reeds, the shawl of brilliant green
weeds are not one, nor the stepping stones
leading submerged to the far shore.
There is a reason rivers share their names,
but it is not that the rivers are one. Each river
is its own region happening again:

upstream is the paintworks and the canoeing gates,
then the high ground of another moor.
Downstream is private fishing and, beyond
the wide-smiling weir, an idle brick mill
no longer part of the river's argument.
This river hidden in the shadow of the cliffs,
swollen by others running under stone,
cannot imagine another stone and another hill.

Listen: and you will hear the quiet bank,
the still downfall of democratic rain,
discursive murmurs which a listening child
might hear as the silver progress of a stream
because the stream is there, where the child
is playing while the adults sit and talk.
It is the sound of movement watching
the leaves that fall and fall through time.

Be suspicious of what the river teaches:
brown water cannot be throttled or sued,
and lovers can't be blamed for why we love them.
It is the godhead's delta, one as many
are one, like an edition of a newspaper
(the *Angling Times!*). Its headline
is a gurgling message which you alone can hear.
Listen to what the stream is calling, asking.

Lie back in the meadow. Maybe in water's meadow
you will drown, unable to respond.
That will not matter. Others will hear
the river's calm involuntary seething,
and they will answer the challenge you have failed.
They will fail it too, but that does not matter:
there are others coming, always themselves and listening, running,
rivers returning to the open and generous sea.

The Rural Citizen

'You took our buses, now give us some footpaths'
– headline in the *Northumberland Gazette*

Scorning the honey-pot mountain with car park and centre
where local crafts are displayed and distinctive
patterns of rock that have 'shaped the life of the valley'
are shown colour-coded, scorning the barely visible
hump of the wall of the Iron Age fort
(now a khazi for sheep) and the cup and ring scars,
I emptied the flask in the river, dropped off my rucksack
as shrine on the roadside, buried my boots
in the mud by the gate where the mud-coloured cows
had thronged to be fed or to die since enclosure,
and set off in trainers and jeans for the commonplace hill.
There was the shell of the old-fashioned telly
dumped in the layby, the litter from Starbucks,
the four hundred yards on the verge of the sixty-zone road,
the overgrown stile to the field with the bull in,
leading to nowhere in woods where eerily echoed
the cry of a buzzard being mobbed by black-coated crows.
Easy to think of the buzzard as me, the crows
as the agents of death. Easy to shiver and think
that my boots might rise from the earth and pursue me
assisted by footprints in that mucilaginous mud by the gate
and herds of the cattle as solid as mist on the fields
at morning, as cow-breath, the ghosts of the drovers and driven
coming to claim me. But truer that I was a crow,
one of the many, the buzzard the gold-coloured State
that was conjured and breasted by money — its infinite,
intricate feathers. We pursued it, I and the ghosts
who did not walk with me, could not, marooned
in their estates and parishes, interred in the graveyards
and kitchens and pubs by immovable earth
and the price of petrol and frailty of reasons for leaving
the heated and taxed habitations to go
across country, and learn by the ache in their knees
each swell of the fields that contained them, each darkened corner
where nothing but dock and the odd sprig of rape
could be found to enlighten their hearts on the topic of growth.
I was the lesser, the rural citizen
who does not understand his city
which hedgerows and tied-shut gates refuse him.
We dream of the desert, for the desert's monstrous
sculptures make plain a horror we hope stands with us,
the hosts of the dead that make of the living a host
and underwrite our demand to the sacrificial king:
you have taken our first-born sons, you have taken
our right to guard every hearth with a spear;
now give us the ear of the scribes of the law
that asserts us, now give us, by royal command,
our being in the fields of wheat and the beasts.

Wordsworth at Goslar, Cockermouth and Hawkshead: A Biographical Essay

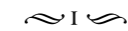
John Strachan

Was it for this
That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved
To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song,
And, from his alder shades and rocky falls,
And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice
That flowed along my dreams? For this didst thou,
O Derwent, traveling over the green plains
Near my 'sweet birthplace', didst thou, beauteous stream,
Make ceaseless music through the night and day,
Which with its steady cadence tempering
Our human waywardness, composed my thoughts
To more than infant softness, giving me
Among the fretful dwellings of mankind
A knowledge, a dim earnest, of the calm
Which Nature breathes among the fields and groves?

Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1799), l. 1–15

These words, which begin the first book of the first version of Wordsworth's autobiographical poem *The Prelude*, written in a freezing Germany in 1798, resonate through our modern understanding of British Romanticism and the Wordsworthian conceptualization of poetry. As we have seen, they also provided the inspiration for the first work of art discussed in this book, Brian Thompson's 'Frozen River' (2012). And as we have also seen the lines are also directly echoed in the poems in this volume by John Strachan and Tony Williams, both entitled 'Derwent'.

In what follows, Strachan offers a biographical account of the composition of the opening lines of *The Prelude* in the Wordsworths' cold Lower Saxon retreat in Goslar. He also looks at the substance and subject of those lines in examining Wordsworth's feelings about his 'sweet birthplace' at Cockermouth and the 'beauteous stream' of the Derwent which ran beside it.



Germany, Winter 1798

It was cold. The coldest winter of the eighteenth century, the locals said. And the two of them in what seemed like the coldest apartment in all of Germany, conditions so bitter, wrote Dorothy Wordsworth, that moving from the one heated room upstairs to elsewhere in their small flat necessitated the wearing of greatcoats. Indeed, her brother William joked that his landlady in Goslar, Frau Depperman — 'rather unfeelingly' — half-expected him 'to be frozen to death some night'. But the poet was better able to care for himself, and wore a fur-lined coat and a hat fashioned from dog skin — as favoured by the area's peasantry — to brave the elements. Struggling with his spoken German, Wordsworth cared little for the local gentryfolk (some of whom thought that his sister was no more than his mistress), nor for the town's vulgar tradesmen (whom he and Dorothy considered to be little more than grasping cheats). Indeed, his principal affection amongst the inhabitants of Goslar, he recalled, was reserved for a sleek kingfisher, 'a beautiful creature that used to glance by me' on his trips out in the cold as Wordsworth circled round a pond near his residence, composing under his breath and muttering, as was his habit, new-formed verse to himself which he refined and polished as he walked.

It was during one of these chilly Teutonic perambulations in the winter of 1798/9 that Wordsworth wrote 'A Poet's Epitaph', verses in which he meditated on what it

meant to be a poet, or at least to be a poet such as himself for whom solitude and the natural world were imaginatively enlivening:

The outward shows of sky and earth,
Of hill and valley, he has viewed;
And impulses of deeper birth
Have come to him in solitude.

In common things that round us lie
Some random truths he can impart, —
The harvest of a quiet eye
That broods and sleeps on his own heart.

‘Common things that round us lie’: these six words might be said to sum up the preoccupations of William Wordsworth’s mature poetic style. Himself (matters of ‘his own heart’), nature (the ‘shows of sky and earth’), his family and the small – but to him remarkable — events of everyday life; these things echo throughout his verse in the so-called ‘Great Decade’ of Wordsworth’s power, from the composition of the *Lyrical Ballads* with S. T. Coleridge in 1797–8 to the *Poems in Two Volumes* of 1807. Though no one reads the entirety of Wordsworth’s long catalogue of verse with unalloyed pleasure (the second half of his eight decades not being notable for the sustained quality of his writing), in his ten-year pomp the poet changed the nature of modern poetry, and it was in Goslar that Wordsworth began his greatest work.

Common things; ‘I consequently became much attached to it’, wrote Wordsworth of his kingfisher, the avian friend who had prompted him, in part, to the composition of the ‘Poet’s Epitaph’. All things were instinct with life and meaning for the poet at this moment in his career. In the kitchen at Goslar, for instance, he looked and meditated upon a less fortunate creature than the lovely bird of the frost — a death-bound fly, struggling on the oven, its short life ending as it unwisely sought the deadly warmth of a stove. At least Dorothy was here with him, he mused companionably; this

poor insect had no sister or devoted friend to sustain him. On the next day, by the pond, the fly was memorialised in the anapaestic lines ‘Written in Germany on One of the Coldest Days of the Century’:

His spindles sink under him, foot, leg and thigh,
His eyesight and hearing are lost,
Between life and death his blood freezes and thaws;
And his two pretty pinions of blue dusky gauze
Are glued to his sides by the frost.

No brother, no mate has he near him — while I
Can draw warmth from the cheek of my Love;
As blest and as glad, in this desolate gloom,
As if green summer grass were the floor of my room,
And woodbines were hanging above.

The mixture of the macabre, mock-heroic and the tender in this is striking, and few previous English poets would have been capable — or indeed willing — to venture the Miltonic phrase ‘pretty pinions of blue dusky gauze’ to describe an insect’s wings. But more to the point here is Wordsworth’s capacity to wring emotion from a situation others might think mundane, something which was to lead the poet into becoming the butt of satirists’ jokes and reviewers’ scorn in the next two decades (Francis Jeffrey, the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, accused the poet in 1807 of ‘connecting his most lofty, tender, or impassioned conceptions, with objects and incidents ... low, silly, or uninteresting’).

Wordsworth made small things large, made the everyday seem charged with philosophical meaning. However, at this particular moment in time, despite having Dorothy around, despite the comfort which she afforded and despite the small miracles of such stuff as the verses on the fly, the poet found it hard to shake off the sense of disappointment and, indeed, failure which he frequently felt in the winter of

1798/9. Lyrics on moribund insects were all very well, but such were not what he had come to Germany to achieve. There were two reasons he was in that country: to learn the language and to work on the *The Recluse*, the great poem which Coleridge had been encouraging him to write ‘On Man, On Nature, and on Human Life’ (which would, in the latter’s optimistic vision, be the epochal poem of the age, the *Paradise Lost* of the nineteenth century). Now both trees appeared to him to be without fruit. The German language was not proving as easy to learn as the French which Wordsworth had mastered on previous trips to the continent or the Italian he had studied while at Cambridge. *The Recluse* was also elusive, and he could make no progress with it. And Coleridge was gone after their brief stay all together in Hamburg, to society life outwith their means, in Ratzeburg further north, and was headed thereafter to one of the great German universities at Göttingen. Perhaps it is not absurd to see ‘The Poet’s Epitaph’, which came to Wordsworth in Goslar at the turn of the year 1799, as symbolically — if not literally — telling, indicative of a dread of his own poetic extinction. Perhaps the slow extinction of the fly was to be a metaphor of his own poetic fate.

And yet. The fact is, however, that Wordsworth by this year’s end in Goslar — without knowing it — had already stumbled upon a hugely important new direction in his work. He had begun what is generally seen as his poetic masterpiece, *The Prelude, or, Growth of a Poet’s Mind*. At some point in October 1798 Wordsworth took up the notebook in which he and Dorothy had recorded their impressions of their Hamburg visit in late September and early October and the pair’s trip south to Saxony. He started to write once more, this time in verse, and he began to express his self-reproach at his inability to work in any sustained manner on *The Recluse*. He, a chosen one, the man to whom Coleridge, with his immense and obvious talents, was prepared to defer, the man who at Cambridge had felt himself destined for poetic greatness, and the man, in particular, fortunate enough to have experienced what he saw as the ideal childhood for a poet — or so it seemed to him — in the English lakes, was failing in

his mission. *Has it come to this?* he thought, and so he wrote:

Was it for this
That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved
To blend his murmurs with my nurse’s song,
And, from his alder shades and rocky falls,
And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice
That flowed along my dreams? For this didst thou,
O Derwent, traveling over the green plains
Near my ‘sweet birthplace’, didst thou, beauteous stream,
Make ceaseless music through the night and day,
Which with its steady cadence tempering
Our human waywardness, composed my thoughts
To more than infant softness, giving me
Among the fretful dwellings of mankind
A knowledge, a dim earnest, of the calm
Which Nature breathes among the fields and groves?

Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1799), l. 1–15

Wordsworth wrote quickly and urgently, unaware that this would be a process of composition that would last over forty years, in the tortuous birth of his finest long poem. Rather than the *The Recluse*, eventually left as a mighty fragment, this was the work which would go down to posterity as the most notable long poem of the age. It was the ‘Poem. Title not yet fixed upon by William Wordsworth, Addressed to S. T. Coleridge’ as the title page to its 1805 manuscript version in thirteen books has it. Mary Wordsworth would eventually christen this beauteous child of Wordsworth’s imagination *The Prelude* for its first — and posthumous — publication in 1850, the year of the poet’s death.

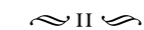
Here, in his great account of his childhood and early manhood, Wordsworth ‘broods... on his own heart’. In so doing, he delivered himself of one of the founding

documents of modern verse. The critic Harold Bloom (in his 1982 book *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism*) once wrote that after the *Lyrical Ballads* ‘the best poetry internalized its subject matter ... in the mode of Wordsworth after 1798’. ‘Wordsworth’, declares Bloom, ‘had no true subject except his own subjective nature, and very nearly all significant poetry since Wordsworth ... has repeated Wordsworth’s inward turning’. The second part of this statement is decidedly overstated, but the notion has much truth and critical power; whether post-Romantic in an enthusiastic sense (the Victorian poetry of Tennyson and Arnold, the twentieth century masters W. B. Yeats and Wallace Stevens, and contemporary greats such as Seamus Heaney) or in an antipathetic manner (in the critical attitudes of the Modernist titans T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound), Wordsworth and his successors have cast a very long shadow on poetry in the two centuries which have passed since their emergence as the most controversial and brilliant poets of the late Georgian age. And the greatest moment of Wordsworth’s ‘inward turning’ was this poem of Saxon provenance, written after the *Lyrical Ballads* but dealing with the events which came before, in the first twenty years or so of Wordsworth’s life.

Here in Goslar, Wordsworth was writing out his birthright, telling of his Lake District boyhood, his schooling and his tutoring at the hands of nature as well as by his family and teachers. In the first book of *The Prelude*, composed between October 1798 and February 1799, Wordsworth wrote of simple things: of skating, swimming, playing cards with his school friends, hunting woodcocks, an illicit trip on Ullswater in a stolen boat, birds’ nesting, even noughts — and — crosses. He offered recollections of his childhood, but also meditations on the nature and significance of that childhood. A central theme in his work is the formation of the poetic imagination, notably in the book’s grand credal statements of belief, such as his assertion that the most significant events in his youth were ‘spots of time’, epiphanic moments which were both educative of his childish consciousness and creatively nourishing to the adult poet. This was life portraiture of a sort, but it was very far from a simple

autobiography or, indeed, an unvarnished account of the poet’s youth. Wordsworth traced ‘the growth of mental power / And love of Nature’s works’ which he had experienced as a ‘child of nature’, to borrow a phrase from the great, final poem of the previous year’s *Lyrical Ballads*, the ‘Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour’.

In tribute verses written the night after he had first heard Wordsworth recite the thirteen-book version of the poem in January 1807, S. T. Coleridge wrote that *The Prelude* dealt with ‘the foundations and the building up / Of a Human Spirit’. That building up — the *Growth of a Poet’s Mind* as Mrs Wordsworth’s eventual subtitle has it — was achieved, in Wordsworth’s account, by the cultivation of his own, powerful imagination at the guiding hands of nature. Though he received an excellent education by the standards of his day at Hawkshead Grammar, the natural world was Wordsworth’s real school. The poet Wordsworth attached a remarkable, almost mystical significance to the events of his youth: his experience of nature, his family, and the very shaping of his creative imagination. All a child was to be, he considered, lies within him in his childhood; ‘The child is father of the man’, as he put it in his famous lyric of 1802, ‘The Rainbow’. And all he was as a poet and a man, he thought, could be explained by the events of his own boyhood in the English Lake District.



Cockermouth and the Derwent

Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
 Fostered alike by beauty and by fear:
 Much favoured in my birth-place.

Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805), l. 301–3

At the side of the river Derwent in the market town of Cocker mouth, to the north of the English lakes, stands a handsome and many-windowed Georgian townhouse — near-mansion. From the moment it was completed in 1745, this was the largest building in what was then a one-street settlement and it was there that William Wordsworth was born on 7 April 1770. However, this house, a giant among pygmies, was not owned by the poet's family. It was the property, rather, of the powerful — and ruthless — local landowner Sir James Lowther (1736–1802), later — from 1784 — the 1st Earl Lonsdale. Lowther was also known by some locals — less impressively but with the bluntness and wit of this part of the north country — as 'Jimmy Grasp-all'.

Lowther was a figure who was to cast a malign shadow over the Wordsworth children's lives and fortunes for many years after their father's premature death. Wordsworth's father, the attorney John Wordsworth (1741–83) worked for this man as a solicitor, land agent and election fixer (Lowther controlled a number of Cumberland and Westmorland 'pocket boroughs' in the House of Commons). He had moved into the imposing property in 1765 after entering Lowther's employ, and was married in the following year to the seventeen-year-old Ann Cookson, the daughter of a prosperous Penrith linen-trader William Cookson and his wife Dorothy.

In Jimmy Grasp-all's house lay the infant babe, William Wordsworth, the second of five children, all of whom, fairly unusually by the standards of the day, survived until adulthood. The poet's elder brother Richard, to whom he was close only in childhood, had been born nigh on two years before, on 19 August 1768. Wordsworth's one sister, Dorothy, arrived the year after him, her day of nativity 25 December 1771, and was followed soon after by the births of her younger brothers John (on 4 December 1772) and Christopher, frequently 'Kit' (9 June 1774).

At the back of the imposing house in which the children were born ran the river. In the very first lines of the first book of the first version of *The Prelude*, drafted in the German chill of 1799, Wordsworth describes himself, though a mere 'babe in arms', listening to the wordless music of the Derwent as it flowed and ebbed outside his

home. Though Cocker mouth is at the confluence of the river Cocker, it is also a place where two rivers meet, and it was the Derwent that both flowed by Wordsworth's house and — or so it seemed to him in retrospect — ran through his infant 'thoughts'. The river, a watery synecdoche of the tutelary power of nature that was to shape his adult imagination, taught him through its 'ceaseless music', a melody which:

composed my thoughts
To more than infant softness, giving me
Amid the fretful dwellings of mankind
A foretaste, a dim earnest, of the calm
Which Nature breathes among the hills and groves.

The Prelude (1799), l. 11–15

'Nature', here personified, was a parental spirit to Wordsworth. That said, Wordsworthian nature is something rather different from the 'Mother Nature' of the popular imagination. For him it was a hermaphroditic presence, so to speak, a force capable of both maternal and paternal 'ministrations'; Wordsworth described himself as someone 'Fostered alike by beauty and by fear'. The natural world could teach softly; it could also be dark, unyielding and punitive.

Whereas his parents died young, nature stayed with Wordsworth throughout his life, as did the recollection of his relationship with nature as a child, whether in moments of fear, as he propelled a stolen rowing boat over Ullswater or, indeed, in moments of joy as he skated alone over a frozen Esthwaite Water as a lad at the Hawkshead Grammar School. Such incidents might seem mundane, but they were not so to William Wordsworth. For him they were occasions of epiphany — 'spots of time' as he called them in *The Prelude* — which, later in life, were capable of nourishing and reinforcing what he denominated the 'imaginative power' of the adult poet. 'Infancy' and 'Nature' — motifs sounded in the opening lines of Wordsworth's verse

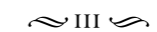
autobiography of his boyhood and early manhood — are central themes in his work. Wordsworth is the great poet of childhood in English verse. From the descriptions of his own youth in *The Prelude* to his powerful and touching narrative poems dealing with children such as ‘We are Seven’, ‘The Idiot Boy’ and ‘Alice Fell’, Wordsworth was always attuned to childhood connectivities and to what he saw as the especial resonance of the experience of the child.

A psychoanalytic critic might argue that the poet, who was forced to abandon his first-born child (as the war with Revolutionary France made peaceful intercourse with that country impossible from 1793 onwards), was prompted to such imaginary tales and colloquies of children’s lives and deaths such as ‘We are Seven’ and ‘Lucy Gray; or, Solitude’ by a sense of loss, even guilt. The same critic might also express little surprise that a poet who lost his mother at the age of seven and his father at the age of thirteen should be preoccupied with the notion of parenting in his verse. However, it is important to stress here that the poet’s primary attention in his autobiographical work is to the parenting afforded by nature rather than his corporeal parents — who are fairly shadowy presences in all of the various versions of *The Prelude* bar one or two pivotal episodes — both in the idea of the nourishing maternal presence of nature and the attendant and concomitant notion of the natural world acting as a tutelary paternal force. Whether the relative absence of his parents in *The Prelude*’s life narratives betokens or symbolises the poet’s actual loss is a moot point and one to which there can be no definitive conclusion.

In a famous paradox, Wordsworth saw another paternal influence evident on his adult selfhood; ‘The child’, he declared in his 1802 lyric ‘The Rainbow’, ‘is father of the Man’. The very familiarity of this great phrase tends to obscure its profundity. ‘How could he not be?’, we might reply, from our point of vantage after Wordsworth, after the Romantics, and after Freud, and in a society which sees the experience of childhood as central to the formation of the human consciousness. However, Wordsworth’s perception here — as so often in his poetic prime — was not that of

all of his peers. The poet’s deep-felt belief in the significance of childhood memories and his valorization of those recollections in verse was greeted with a chorus of jeers by many of the critics and satirists of his day, from Lord Byron downwards, as if the author who wrote so much about infant experience was himself a child. ‘[A]ll who view the “idiot in his glory”’, wrote his lordship of Wordsworth’s ‘The Idiot Boy’, ‘conceive the bard the hero of the story’.

Byron’s view now seems eccentric, while Wordsworth’s seems possessed of a remarkable modernity. These were new notes he was sounding: Wordsworth is one of the patriarchs of the present day, in stressing the importance, even the centrality, of childhood vision and childhood experience in modern culture. And in his own conviction, he, William Wordsworth, was particularly fortunate in having the ideal childhood, as someone who, as he put it in a letter of 16 Dec 1845, ‘spent half of his boyhood in running wild among the Mountains’. Among the mountains, in the river, on the lake, under the waterfall; in the beauty of the Lake District, Wordsworth, of all poets, saw himself as ‘most favoured in my birthplace’.



Cockermouth and Hawkshead

William Wordsworth did not experience his mother’s ‘dear Presence’ — as he calls it in *The Prelude* — for very long. By the day of his eighth birthday she was dead. But, as he looked back on it, Ann Wordsworth’s short life as a mother was, for him, a vision of love. And she, like the maternal mode of nature itself, served to shape the man he would become. In a remarkable passage of the *1850 Prelude*, one of the few references to his mother in the poem, Wordsworth imagines himself, a suckling babe, imbibing from the breast his mother’s heightened emotional sensibility and, indeed, her awareness of nature:

blest the Babe,
Nursed in his Mother's arms, who sinks to sleep
Rocked on his Mother's breast; who with his soul
Drinks in the feelings of his Mother's eye!

Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1850), ll. 234–7.

The context of the passage makes clear that his words here refer to his own mama, as well as to the noblest kind of mothers in general. It seemed to Wordsworth in his eulogy to Ann that his mother, like 'Nature', like the Derwent, played a central role in connecting him with the world around him. His imagery moves from the lactatory to the umbilical:

No outcast he, bewildered and depress'd:
Along his infant veins are interfus'd
The gravitation and the filial bond.
Of nature, that connect him with the world.

Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805), ll. 261–4

This rather metaphysical inheritance notwithstanding, in terms of detailed remembrance of his mother, Wordsworth declared that he only recalled vivid details of Ann in a particular few moments of his childhood, such as the time when she pinned a nosegay to his breast as he went to say his catechism in church, and her chiding words when he once went to the same place expecting bounty for his diligence:

I remember also telling her on one week day that I had been
at church, for our school stood in the churchyard, and we had
frequent opportunities of seeing what was going on there.
The occasion was, a woman doing penance in the church in a

white sheet. My mother commended my having been present, expressing a hope that I should remember the circumstance for the rest of my life. 'But', said I, 'Mama, they did not give me a penny, as I had been told they would'. 'Oh', said she, recanting her praises, 'if that was your motive, you were very properly disappointed'.

Mrs Wordsworth seems to have been characterised, in general, by a serenity of manner and by a kind indulgence to her little flock of children. Certainly she was liberal in her treatment of her offspring in terms of giving them leeway to explore and to find adventure. The older boys, and especially William, were very frequently out of their mama's sight, to an extent which would seem odd (and perhaps reprehensible) to some in our modern, arguably more protective, age. Wordsworth frequently roamed unsupervised through Cockermouth and its rural environs, getting into scrapes such as trapping himself in a dungeon at the town's castle as well as such acts of derring-do and sportive giddiness as stealing birds' eggs, leap-frogging and racing against his brothers and other boys. As well as such pleasures and naughtinesses, Wordsworth was also, as he did throughout his life, here obtaining a personal geography of the places in which he lived. Cockermouth and Hawkshead, and their surrounding countrysides, were the hedge schools of his imagination.

Poet of nature in embryo he may have been, but as well as looking and observing, roaming and playing were William Wordsworth's delight. Whereas S. T. Coleridge described himself as someone who 'took no pleasure in boyish sports', Wordsworth, on the other hand, revelled in them, especially in skating, swimming, running, and in death-dealing activities which were almost unequivocally seen as sports in his day such as angling and trapping birds.

These pastimes of the country — his reactions to them and experiences of them — are at the heart of the Wordsworthian poetic philosophy, and were very important both

to the child and, later, to the adult poet. In the first hundred lines of the 1799 *Prelude*, Wordsworth describes himself bathing in the Derwent — carelessly dashing wild flowers as he ran — and, most strikingly, as ‘a naked savage’ cavorting ‘in the thunder-shadow’ as the mountain of Skiddaw and its environs were bathed in the fiery incandescence of a lightning storm. After this, he describes his eight-year-old self laying traps (‘springes’) to catch woodcocks (game birds of nocturnal habits which are similar to pheasants):

’twas my joy
To wander half the night among the cliffs
And the smooth hollows where the woodcocks ran
Along the moonlight turf. In thought and wish
That time, my shoulder all with springes hung,
I was a fell destroyer. Gentle powers,
Who give us happiness and call it peace,
When scudding on from snare to snare I plied
My anxious visitation, hurrying on,
Still hurrying, hurrying onward, how my heart
Panted; among the scattered yew-tress and the crags
That looked upon me, how my bosom beat
With expectation!

Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1799), l. 30–42

This being Wordsworth, his childhood experiences, though entirely rooted in common circumstance, in the end seem like those of few others. As so often in the ‘spots of time’ we move from an opening grounded in everyday circumstance to encountering something much stranger, in a turn to the imaginative, if not the uncanny. After confessing an act of petty criminality in stealing a bird from another’s trap, Wordsworth recalls the youthful hunter hearing strange ‘breathings’ among the hills pursuing him — and the footfalls of he knew not what. Both of these extraordinary circumstances seemed to express nature’s disapproval of the ‘savage’s’ act:

Sometimes strong desire
Resistless overpowered me, and the bird
Which was the captive of another’s toils

Became my prey; and when the deed was done
I heard among the solitary hills
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
Of undistinguishable motion, steps
Almost as silent as the turf they trod.

Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1799), l. 42–9

After the hunting woodcocks and the ravens’ nest sublimities, Wordsworth mounts the philosophical soapbox in a clear and explicit statement of belief:

I believe
That there are spirits which, when they would form
A favoured being, from his very dawn
Of infancy do open out the clouds
As at the touch of lightning, seeking him
With gentle visitation ...
Others too there are, who use,
Yet haply aiming at the self-same end,
Severer interventions, ministry
More palpable — and of their school was I.

Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1799), l. 68–80

In this credal statement, Wordsworth makes the perhaps surprising claim that in the face of ‘a punishing supernatural presence’, we are, as Jonathan Wordsworth once wrote, ‘asked to regard his experience as formative, beneficial, evidence that the poet had been from the first a “chosen son”’.

Immediately after this peroration in the *Two-Part Prelude*, Wordsworth gives, as a vivid example of these ministrations, an account of the time (probably in the summer of 1781) in which at Patterdale, the small but attractive village on Ullswater, he stole a shepherd’s rowing boat and pushed it out on to the waters of the lake. This action, he maintains, was prompted by the direct intervention of the tutelary spirits:

They guided me: one evening led by them
I went alone into a shepherd's boat,
A skiff that to a willow tree was tied
Within a rocky cave, its usual home.
The moon was up, the lake was shining clear
Among the hoary mountains; from the shore
I pushed, and struck the oars, and struck again
In cadence, and my little boat moved on.

Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1799), l. 81–88.

'It was an act', writes Wordsworth, 'of stealth / And troubled pleasure' (*Prelude*, 1799, l. 90–1), and here again the ministry of fear, so to speak, is evident in his account of the way in which the youthful miscreant felt himself destined for just punishment at the avenging hands of nature. A huge mountain, it seemed to him, sprang to life and began to chase him, its pursuit the direct result of his morally suspect behaviour:

... a huge cliff
As if with voluntary power instinct
Upreared its head. I struck, and struck again.
And, growing still in stature, the huge cliff
Rose up between me and the stars, and still,
With measured motion, like a living thing
Strode after me.

Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1799), l. 108–14

Nature was by no means always a kind and beneficent force in *The Prelude*; rather more often the emphasis is on its sterner ministrations in moments of peril such as this and in the various moments in which Wordsworth recounts his guilt at some boyish transgression. In Wordsworth's remarkable poetic vision, a mountain was capable of administering retribution and 'strode after' him, dispensing a rough visionary justice

to the youthful poet. What are we to make of episodes such as these, a hybrid of the visionary and what we would generally see as 'real' experience? *The Prelude* is not meant to be read as an unvarnished memoir and in terms of the plain empirical 'truth' it is most likely that no such thing was occurring. But so it seemed to the child, and to the adult poet as he looked back on the most creatively nourishing — though sometimes fearful — moments of his childhood. We have no reason to believe that the poet made up his story of the theft of the boat or exaggerated his childish sense that punishment was nigh. For William Wordsworth, imaginative experience was often as real as reality itself.

Though Wordsworth saw his childhood as resonant with symbolic significance, these 'spots of time' are rooted in common experience of boyish adventures. Whatever its darker shades and whatever its attendant pains, to Wordsworth childhood was charged with a joyous incandescence in which the infant arrives, as he puts it in the 'Immortality Ode', 'trailing clouds of glory'. Despite the death of his parents and the separation from his sister, and the 'shades of the prison house' which, according to the Great Ode, 'close around the growing boy', Wordsworth was convinced that in his youth he was frequently among the 'happiest on earth' (in *The Prelude*'s phrase), and never more so than in his infancy as he swam at the back of the great house in the beloved Derwent, his mother unwatching but simultaneously, it seemed to him, protective. In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth takes to the river, and, indeed, talks to the river, here a personified presence which he addresses directly:

I, a four years' child
A naked boy, among thy silent pools
Made one long bathing of a summer's day
Basked in the sun, or plunged into thy streams.

Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1799), l. 17–20.

The Derwent was, to Wordsworth, a kind of literary birthing pool. In a remarkable poetic fragment, 'Yet once again', written in 1796 or 1797, which was later echoed in the opening lines of 'Tintern Abbey', Wordsworth, who famously wrote in the younger poem of the process of poetic creation as the interchange between what we 'half create, / And what perceive', portrays the Derwent as possessed of a voice:

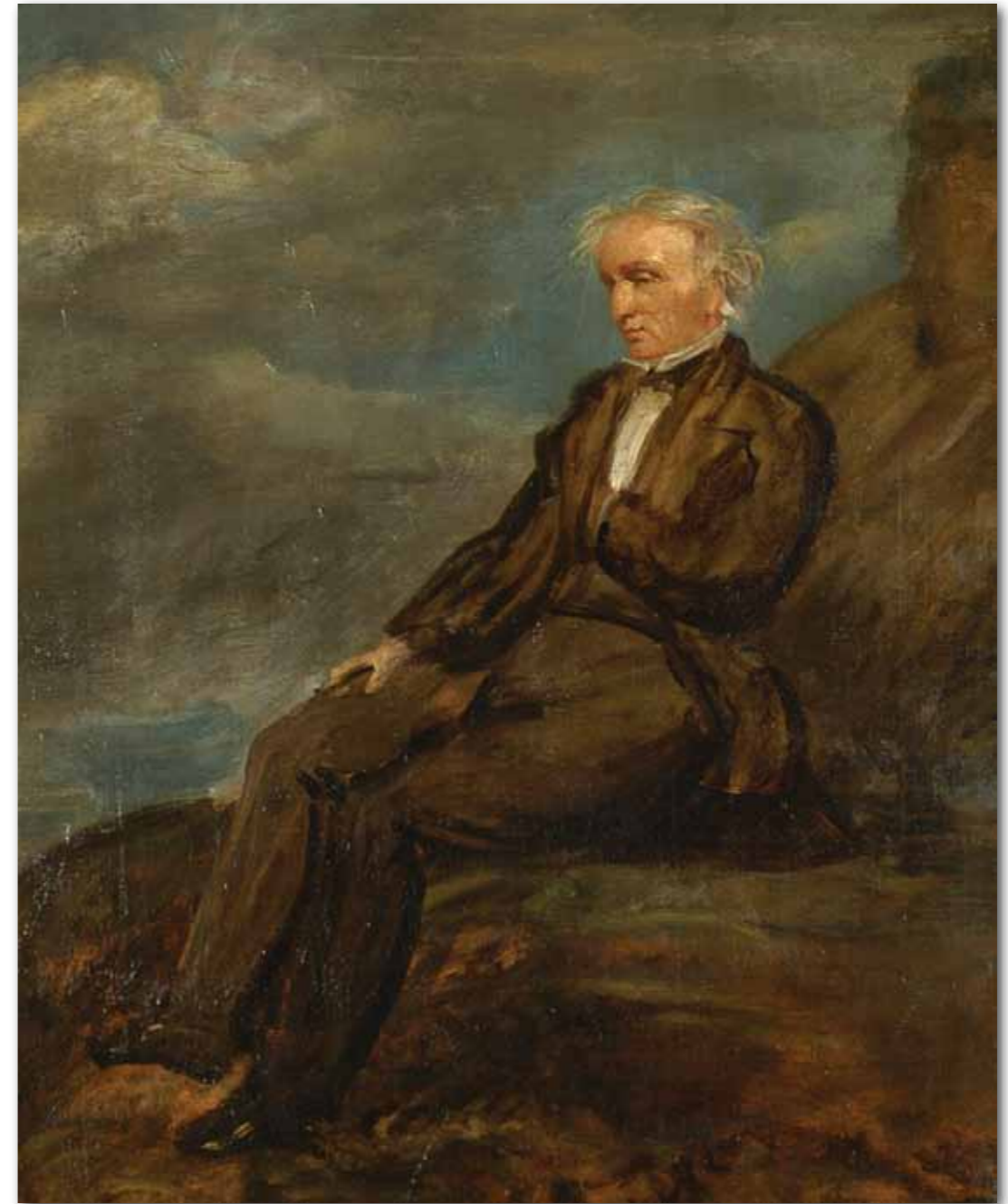
Yet once again do I behold the forms
Of these huge mountains, and yet once again,
Standing beneath these elms, I hear thy voice
Beloved Derwent, that peculiar voice
Heard in the stillness of the evening air,
Half-heard and half-created.

Wordsworth, 'Yet once again', 1-6.

In these six lines we see the essence of the Wordsworthian version of Romanticism. Here Wordsworth dwells on the 'ennobling interchange' — *The Prelude's* phrase — which he saw as giving rise to imaginative creation. And here, as in 'Tintern Abbey', great poetry is produced by the fruitful relationship between the natural world and the creative imagination, between 'the mighty world / Of eye and ear' and 'all that we behold / From this green earth'. Nature formed William Wordsworth, but in the modern literary consciousness it is also fair to say that Wordsworth created nature.



'Poem/Title Not Yet Fixed Upon/by William Wordsworth/Addressed to S.T.Coleridge'
Title-page of a fair copy of the 1805 Prelude
(Courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust)



B.R. Haydon Wordsworth on Helvellyn 1843
(Courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust)

Afterword

‘An inspiration for us all’

Jeff Cowton, Curator, The Wordsworth Trust

‘An inspiration for us all’; these are the final words of Nicholas Roe’s Foreword to this book, referring to the legacy of Wordsworth’s writing and ideas. There is inspiration in the poetry itself, however it is reproduced, but further inspiration is also to be found in the tangible form of its first appearance on paper in the manuscripts now held by the Wordsworth Trust at Grasmere. For Wordsworth, the creation and revision of new composition was a continuous process, sometimes ended only by the deadline of the press. It was a process of honing poetry through regular revisiting to ‘a perfect form’, achieved through a ‘considerate and laborious work’, a ‘slow creation’. It involved not just the poet, but his family, transcribing from dictation and copying out revised verses into neat, fair copy. These manuscripts hold not just words, but moments in time: their meanings go beyond the words. Through them we come closer to that moment and to the people. The manuscripts that are with us also witnessed the presence of one of the greatest poets in English literature.

When we view a manuscript in an exhibition, how often do we read but fail to look? And by failing to look, how much do we miss? If we replaced the manuscript with a transcription of its words, what visual clues to its creation and history would be denied to the visitor? Occasionally, the words on a manuscript can be less important than

its history; a closed exhibit to be looked at but not read. Most often, however, it is a combination of the text and the artefact that creates a powerful and engaging exhibit: the representation of words, images and ideas in a form that itself has history and meaning.

At the Wordsworth Trust, we are currently preoccupied with a number of questions to do with our manuscript holdings of writings by William and Dorothy Wordsworth and members of their circle. How do we stimulate a visitor’s interest in manuscripts without adding more words to an exhibition that already requires the act of reading — more words added to words? How do we create a learning experience that makes the most of the visitor being in the presence of the manuscript, and one that goes beyond regarding the manuscript only as a two-dimensional holder of text? How do we encourage visitors to notice clues in the physicality of the object; to look closely at handwriting styles (different pens and hands, or the same hand instructed from different states of the same mind?); to notice the way the page is laid out; to investigate how the text changes over time through the visible evidence of drafts, revisions and additions; to get a sense of the manuscript’s creation and history over several generations; to imagine what this physical object, perhaps with words of comfort or love, meant emotionally to its creator and subsequent owners?

In essence, how do we enable a visitor to see what at first glance looks like an old piece of paper in a typical museum display, as a thing with a prior life, which witnessed the lives of people every bit as real as ourselves, and which describes feelings and thoughts that are as common to us now as they were to the authors from the past? The text and the artefact: these are a powerful combination, with great learning potential.

The Trust has a history of showing art which responds to



Figure 1
Rob Kessler
'Tea and the Wordsworths'
2001 Texts from the Grasmere
journals printed on bone China
(Courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust)



Figure 2
Heather Bowring
'Idiot Boy'
Sculptured paintings 2002
(Courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust)

Wordsworthiana. For many years, the 3 Degrees West gallery on its Town End site hosted commissioned exhibitions that responded to the Trust's themes and collections. In 2001, for example, in the exhibition *Pollinate: Encounters with Lakeland Flowers*, Rob Kessler reproduced images of the manuscripts of Dorothy Wordsworth's *Grasmere Journals* on a Wedgwood white bone china tea service (see figure 1). Descriptions of flowers in the journals are almost equalled in number by references to drinking tea; the artist commented that 'The social act of drinking tea can be seen as a metaphor for cross-pollination, a fertile exchange where observations gathered each day germinate and take form'.

More recently, the Wordsworth Trust has completed research into new ways of interpreting its manuscript collections, including the use of contemporary art. A report by Piotr Bienkowski in 2011, commissioned by the Trust, recommended that a core principle of manuscript displays should be the involvement of 'different voices'. These 'different voices' would offer new ways of seeing and understanding the manuscript material and allow alternate routes in for visitors, appealing to a range of visitor tastes and learning styles. It was felt that a visual and physical artistic response, by its very nature, would draw attention to the physicality of the manuscript. The current exhibition, *Their Colours and their Forms*, is part of this process, building upon recent events at the Trust's Museum and Jerwood Centre.

In spring 2012, as part of the response to this report, contemporary artists and writers contributed to a conference in Grasmere, 'Words on the Page, and the Meanings Beyond: The Innovative Interpretation of Manuscripts', that discussed how their responses to manuscripts could create new displays. Three artists' responses from this conference were

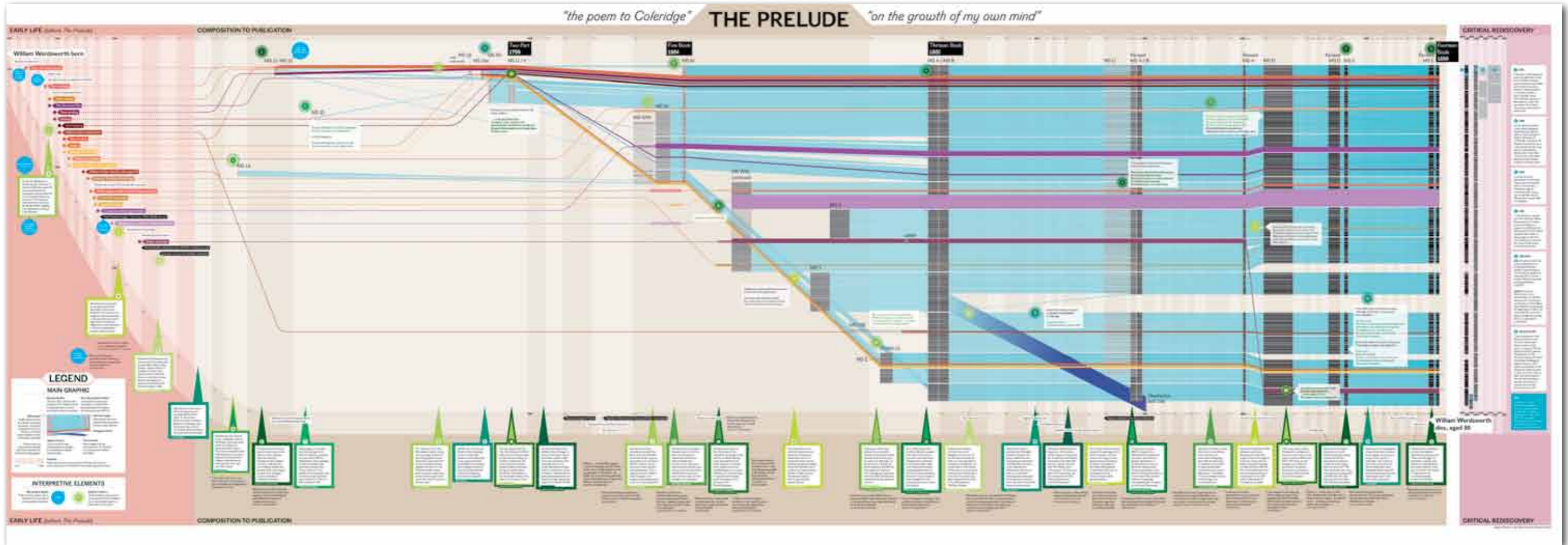
subsequently added to the Wordsworth Gallery. Heather Bowring, who produces tactile, 'sculptured', paintings, interpreted Wordsworth's 1802 letter to John Wilson (in which he gave his defence of 'The Idiot Boy'), using raised lettering that encourages the visitor to feel the words and from there find them in the manuscript itself (see figure 2). Mike Collier exhibited two extracts from Dorothy Wordsworth's journals interpreted with his personal response through use of colour (see figure 3). Brian Thompson exhibited 'Frozen River', reproduced in this book (see p.12), a sculpture in which two of the rivers of Wordsworth's early years are represented in shape, with layers in between representing different drafts of lines of verse to which the rivers relate.

Evaluation of visitor responses to these pieces showed the value of such interpretation methods. Commenting on Mike Collier's pieces, one visitor said, 'Captures imperfections of the writer'; 'I thought about the colour splodges as similar to ink blots on the page'. Evaluation showed their effectiveness to be greatest when art and manuscript were physically close. Focus groups felt that art pieces were an opportunity for the Trust to be more provocative and take risks when highlighting controversial issues. The clear provocation alluding to the word 'idiot' in Heather Bowring's work helped draw some visitors into a debate, a technique that could be further exploited in other commissions.

As another part of this process of artistic engagement with the manuscript holdings of the Trust, Alex Butterworth and Stefanie Posavec created a visualization displaying a timeline of Wordsworth's greatest poem, *The Prelude* (see figure 4). Using the twenty-four surviving manuscripts of the poem, all written between 1798 and 1839 when Wordsworth repeatedly returned to the poem to create its 'perfect form', the artists created a fourteen-foot-wide coloured



Figure 3
Mike Collier
Daffodils 1 2012
(From Dorothy Wordsworth's journal entry,
Friday 16 April 1802)
Digital Print 15 x 10 cms
(Courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust)



visualization that conveys the impression of lines and sections being added, changed and, in some cases, removed from the poem. The visualization contains words, but its power lies in the movement of line and colour in bands wide and thin. It is meticulously researched, operating on vertical and horizontal dimensions, with each thickness of line in the 'bar code' vertical representations of the poem proportionate in size to an actual passage. The viewer is left with an impression of a poem written over forty years, drawing on incidents in early life recollected at different moments in adult life, and modified to lesser or greater degrees until it was prepared for the printer when the poet reached sixty-nine years of age.

The report that resulted from the conference and recent innovations, *Beyond Words: Understanding and Sharing the Meanings of Manuscripts* (2012), will inform the future interpretation of manuscripts in the Wordsworth Museum, and the responses of modern artists and writers will feature in new displays in the main gallery in 2013 and beyond. This wonderful exhibition, *Their Colours and their Forms*, is a very welcome and important next step in this development.

Figure 4
 Alex Butterworth & Stefanie Posavec Timeline of 'The Prelude'
 Inkjet print using latex inks on wallpaper 350 x 122 cms

Notes on Contributors

Tim Brennan

Since the early 1990s Tim Brennan's practice and research into the politics of place has surfaced as sculpture, photographs, painting, performance and writing. He has developed a methodology for the guided walk as a discursive performance that he has termed *the manoeuvre* that involves the collision of quotations with stopping points (stations) along a predesigned route. This approach differs from the conventional guided tour, wrenching the participant into new imaginative and socially charged perspectives of place.

Over forty of these walks have been produced internationally with ten publications including *The British Museum* (2003) and *Venice Biennale* (2011). Recently Brennan has developed a new approach to wayfaring and the tour via leading cross-platform technologies, software and app production (Durham, 2011 and Sunderland, 2012).

Mike Collier

Mike Collier is a lecturer, writer, curator and artist. He studied Fine Art at Goldsmiths College before being appointed Gallery Manager at the ICA in London. He subsequently became a freelance curator and arts organiser, working extensively in the UK and abroad. In 1985 he moved to Newcastle to run the Arts Development Strategy at the Laing Art Gallery, where he initiated the Tyne International Exhibition of Contemporary Art. Since 2004 he has worked at the University of Sunderland. Throughout his career, Collier has maintained his artistic practice and much of his work is based around walking. The research undertaken during these walks (the flora and fauna seen are often linked to place-specific social and sometimes political events) is then assimilated in the studio (in Baltic 39 Studios in Newcastle) where he makes permanent art works for exhibition in galleries and on semi-permanent billboards. Collier's work integrates image and text, often drawing upon the poetic qualities of colloquial names for places, plants and birds. He completed his practice-led PhD at the University of Sunderland in 2010.

Jeff Cowton

Jeff Cowton is Curator of the Wordsworth Trust's collections, a post he has held since 1992. Born in Alnwick, Northumberland, he graduated with a degree in history from the University of Leeds before starting as a volunteer at the Wordsworth Trust in 1981. During his time at Grasmere, he has taken a leading role on several national initiatives, including SPECTRUM (the UK Museum Documentation Standard, 1997) and National Vocational Qualifications for museums. He was chairman of the company that developed the UK's most popular cataloguing software for museums. In 2010, he was awarded an MBE for services to museums.

David Harsent

David Harsent has published nine volumes of poetry. *Legion* won the Forward Prize for best collection 2005; *Night* (2011) won the Griffin International Poetry Prize. His English versions of poems by Yannis Ritsos, *In Secret*, were published in November 2012 and will appear in the USA in Spring 2013. Harsent's *Selected Poems 1969–2005* was published in 2007.

David Harsent has collaborated with composers — most often with Harrison Birtwistle — on commissions that have been performed at the Royal Opera House, the Royal Albert Hall (Proms), the Concertgebouw, the Wales Millennium Centre, the Traverse (Edinburgh), the Megaron (Athens), the South Bank Centre, the Aldeburgh Festival and Carnegie Hall in New York. He is Professor of Creative Writing at Bath Spa University and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

Manny Ling

Manny Ling is a calligrapher, designer and lecturer. He is the Programme Leader for MA Design and the Foundation Degree in Calligraphy and Design at the University of Sunderland. He initiated the special research emphasis on calligraphy at Sunderland since 1999 where he is now Director of the International Research Centre for Calligraphy (IRCC).

Manny Ling specialises in calligraphy, lettering, typographic design, editorial design and print-based media. He is the designer and design editor of the *EDGE* calligraphy journal (UK) and has designed numerous publications for various artists, exhibitions and community projects. Being a Chinese person practising Western calligraphy has had a profound influence on his life. Ling is fascinated by the theme of contrasts and contradictions in his work: East and West, Old and New, Energy and Stillness. He has completed his PhD research in the integration of East Asian and Western cultural influences upon calligraphy. He is also interested in the impact digital media has upon this traditional art form.

Ling has exhibited in many solo and group exhibitions in the UK, France and Australia. His work is also featured in many calligraphy, design and typography publications. He also lectures and conducts workshops in the UK and Europe.

Carol McKay

Carol McKay is a photography lecturer and writer in the Northern Centre of Photography, University of Sunderland. She completed her PhD at the University of Cambridge and has previously worked at Goldsmiths, University of London and University of Wales Institute, Cardiff. Her current research interests focus on changing patterns of commissioning, exhibiting and disseminating contemporary photography and the relationship between social engagement and developing forms of social media. She is co-editor of a new volume of essays *The Versatile Image: Photography, Digital Technologies and the Internet* (forthcoming, 2013) and, in collaboration with Professor Arabella Plouviez, she is researching the role of the photographer in the age of the networked image, examining how practitioners adapt and respond to changing technologies. Carol is project manager of the North East Photography Network (www.northeastphoto.net). With Amanda Ritson she is curating the first international festival of photography and lens-based arts taking place in venues across Sunderland and the North East of England in 2013, supported by Arts Council of England.

Nicholas Roe

Nicholas Roe's books include *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (1988), *Keats and History* (1995), *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (1997), and an acclaimed biography: *Fiery Heart: The First Life of Leigh Hunt* (2005). He was educated at the Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe, and Trinity College, Oxford, before joining the English Department at Queen's University, Belfast, in 1982. He is now Professor of English Literature at the University of St Andrews, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and Chair of the Keats Foundation, Keats House, Hampstead. Roe's *John Keats: A New Life* appeared in 2012.

John Strachan

John Strachan is Professor of English at Bath Spa University. He has masters and doctoral degrees from the University of Oxford. His books and scholarly editions include *Advertising and Satirical Culture in the Romantic Period* (2007), *British Satire, 1785–1840* (2003), *Ireland at War and Peace* (2011, with Alison O'Malley-Younger), *Key Concepts in Romantic Literature* (2011, with his wife, Jane Moore), and *Poetry* (2nd edition, 2011, with Richard Terry). His poetry has appeared in several national magazines. With Muriel Strachan he is currently working on a project on the Wordsworth family. Strachan is Associate Editor of the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and Treasurer of the Wordsworth Conference Foundation.

Robert Strachan

Robert Strachan is a lecturer and sound artist based at the School of Music at the University of Liverpool. He holds an MA (distinction) and a PhD, the focus of which related to the aesthetics and discourses of DIY music scenes. His artistic practice utilises digital technologies at the intersection between electronic music, audio-visual performance and installation art. His solo and collaborative work includes installations and performances at the BBC Festival of Ideas, Foundation for Art and Creative Technology (FACT), Future Everything, Liverpool Biennial, the National Review of Live Art and Tate Liverpool. As part of the Hive Collective, Robert has a track record in developing numerous innovative electronic music performance, multimedia and live art events that have received funding from the Arts Council, the PRS Foundation for New Music and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Strachan has published on a wide variety of topics related to popular music including the mediation of music through such channels as documentary film, music video and music biography, music history and the music industry. His current research on creativity and technology blends research through practice with written scholarly work. He is commissioning editor of the scholarly journal *Popular Music History*, published by Equinox.

Brian Thompson

Brian Thompson graduated from Newcastle University in 1975 with an MFA in Sculpture. He has been awarded numerous prizes including the Pernod Prize and the Peter Stuyvesant Art Prize. His work has been seen through exhibitions, collections and lectures in Europe, USA and Asia including *The Condition of Sculpture*, Hayward Gallery, London; The Paris Biennale; The British Art Show; Sculpture Trails Museum, Indiana; the Ironbridge Museum of Steel Sculpture; Central House of the Artists, Moscow and the Guangdong Museum of Art, China. He was a pioneer of practice-based doctorates in Art & Design, being Director of Studies of one of the first PhD completions in Sculpture in 1992. Thompson is Professor of Sculpture and Associate Dean for Research in Arts, Design and Media at the University of Sunderland. He is a founder member of the University of Sunderland's Walking, Art, Landskip and Knowledge (W.A.L.K.) research group. Brian Thompson's studio is in North Yorkshire, where he lives with his wife Jane.

Sam Wiehl

Sam Wiehl has a design background. He ran the successful multidisciplinary studio Burn Everything for a number of years and was Creative Director at MAS Event and Design, New York. His work takes the form of installations, film, sound, moving image, music, print and performance. His involvement in the music scene has been fundamental in shaping his work and he continues to explore music's potential visual narrative and the politics of music culture alongside his interests in performance and audience participation/response. Recent commissions include Liverpool Biennial, FutureEverything, the Bluecoat and Liverpool John Moores University. He is currently artist in residence at Metal, an interdisciplinary arts lab based in Liverpool and Southend.

Alongside his solo work Sam has collaborated widely with musicians and other artists. As a member of the Hive Collective Sam has worked alongside some of the most prestigious artists in contemporary electronic music including Plaid, Matthew Herbert, Vladislav Delay and Chris Watson. Sam is also resident visual artist for the experimental psychedelic rock band Mugstar.

Tony Williams

Tony Williams is a poet, fiction writer and critic. His poetry publications are *The Corner of Arundel Lane and Charles Street* (2009) (shortlisted for the Aldeburgh, Portico and Michael Murphy Memorial Prizes) and *All the Rooms of Uncle's Head* (2011) (a Poetry Book Society Pamphlet Choice). He has also published a collection of flash fiction, *All the Bananas I've Never Eaten* (2012). Williams is Lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of Northumbria at Newcastle, where he is currently undertaking AHRC-funded research into dog-walking, everyday life, and creative writing practice.

