WORDSWORTH & ECO-POETICS

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I

'… didst thou, beauteous Stream,
Make ceaseless music through the night and day'
(The Prelude, I: 279-280)[1]

> The gardens are devastated and a particularly sad thing for us is that the historic garden walls, some of which were overlooking the River Derwent, which is what created the terrace that William wrote about in The Prelude and where he and Dorothy used to play as children… basically they have completely disappeared; I mean, the stone is there, but the walls have totally collapsed (Weaver 2009).

In November 2009, the town of Cockermouth in Cumbria, birthplace of Wordsworth, was inundated with flood water; the town was overwhelmed. Weather conditions had deteriorated over a number of days and by the afternoon of Thursday 19th, rain was falling heavily and the rivers Cocker and Derwent, which join in the town, had broken their banks. By midnight a torrent raged through the main street, reaching depths of more than eight feet and the garden surrounding Wordsworth's former home was destroyed. On returning to the property the following Monday, Jeremy Barlow, property manager at the Wordsworth House and Garden, was bewildered to find that:

> There's stuff from all over the town in the house and garden. You walk through and there's toys from the toyshop down the road. There's wool everywhere from a wool shop that's, you know, 400m down the main street. It's like all the material that was gathered from the properties further down has ended up in Wordsworth House (Weaver 2009).

This was Wordsworth's childhood home; it had been presented to the National Trust in 1937 by locals who had raised money to purchase and save it from Cumberland Motor Services'

[1] All references are taken from Wordsworth, W. (1991): *The Thirteen Book* Prelude, edited by Reed, M. L., Ithaca, Cornell University Press.

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plan to demolish it to make way for a bus station.[2] It was a structure to suggest a badge of settled fixity and quiet resistance, a gentle emblem of environmental responsibility. It materialized what Jonathan Bate celebrates as the legacy of an ideological position on landscape that Wordsworth himself blueprinted in his Guide to the Lakes, meaning that ‘all who walk in the National Parks are legatees of Wordsworth’ (Bate 1991, p. 49). Preservation, conservation, conservatism. Yet now the property had been swiftly returned to vulnerability, rendered borderless by the river’s demolition of the walls that had structured Wordsworth’s childhood experience. As the Trust’s website now remembers, ‘the tree-lined terrace where William played was open to the river, back wall gone and earth half sucked away’. Wordsworth’s status as ‘the Poet of Nature’ (Anderson 1896, p. 3) and figurehead of an ecological tradition that attunes us to the perilous fate of the earth seemed by this event to have been asserted in the worst of ways. His home had experienced a shift – landscape preservation had slipped, like the silt from the river, into a melting pot of detritus, a repository of displaced ephemera, a museum of ‘stuff’: ‘The rushing water had woven brightly coloured wool from the local knitting shop around trees and bushes’.[3]

Over the weeks and months that followed, the town revived and re-established itself, and is now celebrated as an emblem of recovery and survival spirit. Wordsworth too continued to be caught up in the flood and its aftermath as the lines from *The Prelude* quoted above were chosen to lead a Flood Poetry Trail that featured across the town’s shops and businesses a year later (Wainwright 2010) and in this neutralizing configuration of Wordsworth, poetry, and commercial enterprise, the Derwent was seemingly quietened back into the cadences of blank verse. But I suggest this episode has more unsettling things to offer the (long, varied, contentious) discourse surrounding Wordsworth and eco-poetics. In this forlorn state, the

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[2] National Trust Wordsworth House and Garden website: <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wordsworth-house/things-to-see-and-do/view-page/item412160/> [last accessed 23 July 2013].
[3] National Trust Wordsworth House and Garden website: http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wra-1356312076049/view-page/item412720/ [last accessed 23 July 2013].

wall-less garden, open to the river and full of everyday objects (‘dozens of DVDs, chocolate bars still in their wrappers, potatoes by the sack-load, animal feed and dog coats, women’s underwear and shoes, toys and baby clothes, and even a small chest of drawers and a wicker linen basket’[4]) emerges as a disorientating node of nature/human relations, one that offers a new, and not necessarily comforting, context for reading Wordsworth ecologically.

As has been widely recognized, Wordsworth’s legacy to the ‘environmental tradition’ in English literature has been a focus for debate about relationships between man and land, humans and nature; his poetry is claimed variously to promote a Burkean duty of care for the land (with all the political and ideological implications that holds) or to testify to nature’s fructifying hand in the emergence of poetic selfhood.[5] Wordsworthian nature is nurse, mother, the ground of meaning… or a conservative ideal, an objectified ‘setting’ for middle-class individualism, a resource for poetic exploitation. But, Wordsworth’s house in the Cockermouth floods – literally open to the elements and all their deposits – reconfigures human and nature again, displacing the walls of preservation and protection and replacing them with radical togetherness, emblematized by the disgusting black mud that smeared on the ground-floor walls. In this version of events, I suggest, the house (and from there the ground of Wordsworth’s ‘eco-poetics’) has undergone ‘deep ecological’ change, mirroring the individual self in deep ecology, which, as David Harvey elegantly summarizes, ‘cannot be construed as a bounded entity, a kind of box unto him or herself, but rather like a *point* (which is geometrically defined as something that has no dimensions) formed by innumerable vectors of influences and relations converging at the same junction’ (Harvey 1996, p. 167). One might say with Michel Serres that ‘river, fire, and mud are reminding us of their presence’ (Serres 1990, p. 2) and that this has implications for humanity’s sense of self, the quality of experience. This essay explores the potential in the flooding scene for a

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[4] National Trust Wordsworth House and Garden website: http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wra-1356312076049/view-page/item412720/ [last accessed 23 July 2013].
[5] Hess (2008) summarizes a tradition of eco-critical readings of Wordsworth and Bates (2008) gives a specific history of ‘Tintern Abbey’s place in this. As Kelly writes in 2012, ‘That Wordsworth is an ‘ecological’ poet has become almost a critical commonplace of recent years’ (p. 45).

Wordsworthian eco-poetics that engages the affective experience of the natural world as disordered – not the scene of confirmation or ideal harmony (a steadying presence that must be preserved) but one caught up in a continuous process of interaction with human presence, their shared fate as yet unknown. In recognition of the everyday items that rained down on Wordsworth's house, I explore this eco-poetics as a type of profound ordinariness.

The terms of Wordsworth's relationship to eco-criticism have inevitably been determined by Bate's naming of him as a 'founding father for a thinking of poetry in relation to place, to our dwelling upon the earth' (Bate 2000, p. 205). Naming him thus formed part of a larger project, which was to offer eco-criticism as a reconceived politics, in answer to Marxist critics' 'crude old model of Left and Right' (Bate 1991, p. 3) and, in particular, to critics such as Jerome McGann and Marjorie Levinson, who had drawn robust attention to what they saw as erasures of material, politic history in Wordsworth's writing about nature.[6] Bate's riposte accused such readings of making 'the economy of human society […] more important than […] "the economy of nature"' (Bate 1991, p. 9). As Kerridge has demonstrated, however, such a distinction is complex, and ambivalent even in Bate's account (Kerridge 2012, pp. 18-19). For Wordsworth and eco-poetics though, Bate's intervention has both described and arguably propounded a *de*politicized model of human/nature relations, not least by virtue of his enthusiasm for Wordsworth as a poet who drew on 'reverie, solitude, walking' since 'to turn these experiences into language is to be an ecopoet' (Bate 2000, p. 42). As Scott Hess suggests, the legacy of such an approach has certainly been to secure Wordsworth as central to eco-critical reading (Wordsworth perhaps more than any other writer of the period has been considered in eco-critical terms), but it has also been to take solitary reverie as the exemplary eco-critical experience, with the result that 'such criticism approaches "nature" in the terms Wordsworth himself helped to establish: as a special aesthetic and spiritual sphere for intense individual contemplation, set aside from ordinary social, economic, and political relationships' (Hess 2008, p. 83). Solitary

[6] See McGann (1983), esp. pp. 86-88, and Levinson (1986), esp. 46-57.

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reverie is significantly put into question if we take into account thinkers such as Harvey's view of 'the sociality of any project of Self-Realization' (Harvey 1996, p. 169) and without this, Hess asserts, reading Wordsworth ecologically (in the Bate model) contributes to the damage it purports to decry by becoming a distraction from 'daily lifestyle and social structural action' (Hess 2008, p. 99) due to its view of nature as 'a sphere for authentic individuality, rather than social relationship' (ibid., p. 97). In effect, Hess's critique gives an environmentalist edge to McGann's original provocation that in Wordsworth 'the mind has triumphed over its times' (McGann 1983, p. 88); Hess would say that the same happens again when eco-critics either derive an abstract metaphysics from Wordsworth's ecological engagements, or else see Wordsworth's poetry as a repository of 'wise reminders' of an 'organic and integrated order' (Williams 2011, p. 56), as though they are hermetically sealed from the material effects that this individualizing legacy has had on the landscape.

Acknowledging and rejecting the deficiencies of a model that, even if it seems to trace the establishment of a thoughtful and care-giving relationship between nature and man, is damagingly predicated on the ontological distinctiveness of the human subject, eco-thinkers have importantly called for more nuanced models that bring together a 'deep ecological' commitment to the shared fate of (and responsibility for) our planet with the materialist science that demands that we reconceive of the human species as continuous with other species.[7] Timothy Morton calls this 'ecological thinking', in which 'ecology' is differentiated from 'Nature' (a category that he claims perpetuates '"unnatural" qualities, namely […] hierarchy, authority, harmony, purity, neutrality, and mystery' (Morton 2010)) by being 'profoundly about coexistence' (ibid.). Co-existence here constitutes a more committed interdependency, even shared nature, than does Bate's 'eco-system' (Bate 2000, p. 106) or Adam Potkay's more recent attempt to recover 'Wordsworth's system of things [which]

[7] See Levinson (1995).

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exceeds human agency' (Potkay 2008, p. 392).[8] Its roots may be seen as continuous with Romantic-period science which, as Greg Garrard and Tim Fulford have importantly elucidated, was thinking dynamically about 'the idea of the mutability of species' (Fulford 1997, p. 130) in ways that contributed toward a 'much wider cultural movement away from an atomized view of discrete natural "types" toward a mode of nature as an organic whole, an ecological system' (ibid., pp. 135-6), evidencing the view that 'our own ecological mindfulness […] re-engages an ecological mindfulness of the past' (Williams 2011, p. 55).[9] Such interdependency doesn't so much confirm, nourish or refocus the human subject however, but radically unsettle its terms. My purpose here is not to advance these writers' work by further bringing Wordsworth into view with scientific materialism (although this rich context merits more consideration than has yet been made in the wake of the *Wordsworth Circle*'s 1997 special issue), but to take from these models of 'coexistence' and 'organicism' – models in which the natural and human spheres are discomfortingly continuous – a license to see the Cockermouth floods as an occasion that should affect how we read Wordsworth ecologically. I am led here by Levinson's sense of the necessity and inevitability of presentism, now that 'nature seems […] a finite domain which we are well on our way to exhausting' (Levinson p. 117) since reading from the present must then 'release a very different picture of the human in its physical environments---or, one could say, of the physical environments which compose the human' (Levinson, p. 112).[10]

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[8] Potkay's account, following Bate, still invokes a distinction between an 'economy of human society' and an 'economy of nature' (p. 392), insufficiently accounting for the irreversible ways in which human activity has conditioned the natural world.
[9] See also Garrard (1996) and Levinson (1995).
[10] This phrase alone undermines Potkay's characterization of Levinson's 'new historicist critique' as containing 'fundamental oppositions' between 'human and nonhuman, history and nature' (p. 292).

II

> Many times while going to school have I grasped a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality (Wordsworth 1993, p. 61).

In choosing Wordsworth's lilting, gentle lines about the Derwent, Cockermouth's poetry trail in fact invokes a passage that is troublingly ambivalent about how poetry should record time spent in 'fields and rural walks' (*The Prelude*, I: 244) and about what this means for the aspirant poet's personal ethics. With all the subtlety of *The Prelude*'s many reflexive passages that make poetry out of an uncertainty about poetry, the older Wordsworth couches his younger sense of failure in terms of a failure of reciprocity:

> Like a false Steward who hath much receiv'd
> And renders nothing back.---Was it for this
> That one, the fairest of all Rivers, lov'd
> 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 flow'd along my dreams? (*The Prelude*, I: 271-277)

The earnest desire to write with and of nature is experienced as an 'awful burthen' (I: 235) from which the poet seeks refuge; the thought of writing makes him 'recoil and droop, and seek repose' (I: 268). This is a painful process of scourging scrutiny that pulses with recognition of 'vice and virtue' (I: 241), 'vain perplexity | Unprofitably travelling towards the grave' (I: 269-70), and the knowledge that even 'Humility and modest awe' serve only as a 'cloak | To a more subtle selfishness' (I: 247-48). It ignites a series of memories of Wordsworth's childhood joy at swimming in the river, but also his visits to the woodcocks, amongst whom 'I was a fell destroyer' (I: 329) who 'seem'd to be a trouble to the peace |

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That was among them' (I: 324-25). The grounds for this destructive alterity are drawn back, for Wordsworth, to the awful ease with which he falls into 'false activity' (I. 251) that 'beats off | Simplicity and self-presented truth' (I: 251-52) and blocks the 'philosophic Song | Of Truth that cherishes our daily life' (I: 231-32). Immersion in nature, then, is an ambivalent experience that is troubled by the potentially alienating effects of 'false activity', by the wedge that 'zeal and just ambition' (I: 259) drives between the earth and 'human waywardness' (I: 282). Such distortions are marked as deviations from simplicity, from daily life, and cause pain to a poet who Geoffrey Hartman pioneeringly identified as having 'complete respect for ordinary experience as well as for its extraordinary potential' (Hartman 1987, p. 11). For Hartman's 'unremarkable' Wordsworth, the gradual letting go of 'tangible words' (ibid., p. 27) – we might say instrumental language – delineates an oscillating haptic process that leads to protection – even invulnerability – stability and insight. Although beginning in the 'reality testing' constituted by Wordsworth's grasping at a wall or tree that is, 'incited by a ghostliness in nature' (ibid., p. 22), Hartman finds his poetry 'almost transcends representation, and thus reality testing. It gives up not only the eyes but also touch—tangible words. It seems to exist then without the material density of poetic texture—without imagistic or narrative detail' (ibid., p. 27). By using plain, pared down language (ordinary speech), 'the presence it continues to evoke becomes "untouchable"' and the ordinary thus can 'inexplicably yield descriptions possessing uncanny and hallucinatory power' (Marshall 1987, p. xvii). Indeed, the ordinary is the necessary condition for 'intense and ghostly experiences' (ibid.).

The scene at Cockermouth after the 2009 floods takes us back to this complex, almost occult process in Wordsworth's writing by virtue of its river setting, but its outcome shifts – and this is because this scene of a kind of domesticated post-apocalypse (no walls, trees tangled with knitting wool, mud silted with chocolate bars) radically destabilises the original haptic 'reality-testing' ground from which Hartman's reading proceeds. As Levinson has

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written, an exhausted natural world ‘challenges classical models of the human in a deep and qualitative way’ since ‘lacking an irreducible and as it were, self-perpetuating otherness in nature, structurally guaranteeing the ongoing recognition of the human, our transformative encounters with the physical environment cannot do the same subject-making work they once did’ (Levinson 1995, p. 117). Without walls and trees to grasp, Wordsworth’s home is now caught in that ‘ghostliness of nature’ that Hartman found Wordsworth overcoming and these are the real conditions of ecological reading. The earth has been damaged (a legacy, James McKusick writes, of Romantic-period development (McKusick 1997, p. 123)) and we exist in the ongoing aftermath: ‘and, when the deed was done | I heard among the solitary hills | Low breathings coming after me’ (I: 329-31).

What this demands is that we return to Wordsworth not with the certainty that his poetry will overcome rifts, or initiate an inevitable and soothing return to nature’s economy (not least because in an ecological view nature’s economy is conditioned always by human presence, and *vice versa*), but for how it registers the affective experience of being in a world that is disarrayed, or which goes through moments of oddity and disorientation; a world characterized by regular prompts to recalibrate our relationship with it, rather than by an ongoing predictability. The ties between those prompts aren’t always certain and may denote fracture and alienation as well as comfort. This means feeling for the ambivalence and uncertainty that surrounds Wordsworth’s turn to the Derwent for ‘[tempering] steady cadence’ (I: 281) and reading it from the other side of the river’s destructive breach. What I am seeking in Wordsworth, and in my reading of Wordsworth, is to feel for what Kathleen Stewart identifies as ‘ordinary affects’ (Stewart 2007);[11] and therefore for the ways in which his poetry anticipates the conditions of life in the twenty-first century. As Stewart writes, this ‘means pointing always to an ordinary world whose forms of living are now being composed and suffered, rather than seeking the closure or clarity of a book’s interiority or riding a great

[11] I am indebted here, as so often, to Emma Mason’s suggestive reading and her identification of Stewart’s project as Wordsworthian.

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rush of signs to a satisfying end' (Stewart 2005, p. 5). This might be where it's possible to find the selfhood that David Harvey insists must face and acknowledge itself as interdependent, political, and social, as is the natural world itself.

My springboard here is the fact that the Cockermouth floods didn't face the guardians of Wordsworth's house with alterity as such (the world wasn't unrecognizable), it was just unrecognizable *in that form*. In the economy of Cockermouth, ordinary items belonged down the road, patiently waiting in their shops to be bought and integrated smoothly into people's lives, but in ways that suggest a potent agency to their ludic and historical powers, here they were, strewn around Wordsworth's garden: this is where they came. The items that swirled in with the mud and river water, riding the wave that destroyed his walls, were wool and toys – material artefacts that hark back to Cumbria's cloth-making, shepherding past (of which Wordsworth wrote so much in *Lyrical Ballads*) and metonymically to Wordsworth's childhood encounters. These little pieces of touching detritus offer themselves as totems (and returns) of the ordinary made extraordinary by the forces of nature and I suggest them as affective nodes – it is the sight of these dislocated objects, after all, that emblematise the flood for Barlow, and that cause his narrative to stutter, perhaps even reel, in its attempt to make sense of a present that was, not least by virtue of the historical and national significance of this Wordsworthian spot, becoming an event. Lauren Berlant has written of affect at such moments as a phenomenon whose 'activity saturates the corporeal, intimate, and political performances of adjustment that make a shared atmosphere something palpable and, in its patterning, releases to view a poetics, a theory-in-practice of how a world works' (Berlant 2011, p. 16). I turn now to the *Lyrical Ballads* to seek to release an eco-poetics from its patterning of human/nature relations in affective, corporeal performances.

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III

In his recent book on Wordsworth's engagement with the rural poor, Quentin Bailey rightly points out the shortcomings of reading 'Tintern Abbey' 'as if the poem were somehow wholly independent of its surroundings' (Bailey 2011, p. 143); such isolating gestures, he illustrates, allow critics to manage a delineation of Wordsworth's landscape poetics, but this is necessarily compromised by their neglect of how, 'Tintern Abbey' dynamically 'asks the reader to recall all the stories that have been told' (ibid., p. 145) in the *Lyrical Ballads*. By such means, Bailey argues, Wordsworth 'emphasis[es] the value in all the lives the poems chart' by 'seeking to construct, in "Tintern Abbey," a subjectivity that can accommodate the vagrancy and mendacity that so irked the statesmen of the 1790s' (ibid. p. 162). If 'Tintern Abbey' exemplifies Wordsworth's eco-poetics, then they are an eco-poetics of human / landscape interaction, and are a marker of the material histories that were contemporaneously conditioning the landscape at the time of Wordsworth's writing. As Helena Kelly's careful uncovering of historical record demonstrates, the disenfranchised lives in the *Lyrical Ballads* emerge from 'the pressures which are forcing agricultural change and the cost of that change---both in terms of individual hardship and the loss of the old way of interacting with the land' (Kelly 2012, p. 45). With this context in view the *Lyrical Ballads* becomes a reflexive and affective record of the material history that brings us to our own ecological moment. The alienated figures of the sheep and cloth industries – those in 'The Last of the Flock', 'The Female Vagrant', 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill', and 'Michael' – are ghosts caught in the webs of wool that wrapped itself around the trees in the Cockermouth floods, the yarn for leisure knitting now the residual trace of the 'empty loom, cold hearth, and silent wheel' ('The Female Vagrant', l. 89)[12] that, like their owners, became disqualified objects in a changing economy. The *Lyrical Ballad*'s complex and bi-genred method can release the poetics of 'how the world work[ed]' (Berlant 2011, p. 16) during this change

[12] All references are taken from Wordsworth, W. (1992): Lyrical Ballads *and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, edited by Butler, J. and Karen Green, Ithaca, Cornell University Press.

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through affect, rhythm, form, and metre (iambs and anapaests that not only recall the cadences of the natural world per se, but of its mobilization in human activity – the spinning wheel, tree felling, reaping, digging). From here the collection emerges as a record that should contribute to the 'difficult issue' that John Bellamy Foster insists faces the Left in thinking ecologically: 'understanding the *evolving material interrelations* (what Marx called "metabolic relations") between human beings and nature' (Foster 2000, emphasis in the original).[13] In the last part of this essay I offer some close-reading notes on one 'interrelation' in the second volume of the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*: between 'The Brothers' and 'Nutting'.

The former poem opens with a vision of subsistence labour: a priest is working with his wife and daughter to spin yarn that will form cloth to clothe the family. The blank verse is measured and calm, following the rhythms of work that provide the priest's reference points – reaping corn, carding wool, feeding a spindle, turning 'a large round wheel in the open air | With back and forward steps' ('The Brothers', ll. 24-25). But the priest's family activity transpires to be a residual reminder of a larger community of subsistence that now has been destroyed: we learn, as he speaks to an approaching visitor, of how a nearby:

> [E]state and house were sold, and all their sheep
> A pretty flock, and which, for aught I know,
> Had clothed the Ewbanks for a thousand years
>
> (ibid., ll. 297-99).[14]

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[13] Wordsworth's concern in 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill', in which impoverished spinner Goody Blake relies on gathering excess wood from Harry Gill's property, importantly anticipates Marx's first article as the young editor of *Rheinische Zeitung* in 1842. '"Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood" marked an intellectual turning point in [Marx's] life. This, he insisted was "the really earthly question in all its life-size"' (Foster 2000). Foster's account of 'Marx's ecology' is grounded in a wide-ranging discussion of materialist thought that uncovers Marx's critique of alienated labour as an ecological critique.

[14] It fits with the *Lyrical Ballads*' preoccupation with modes of remembrance and record-keeping that the family name is all that remains of sheep farming, a testament now only to alienation from the land.

The leading narrative of this poem is the desperate tale of a mariner who returns to the land his family had farmed and finds himself the unwilling audience to his own tale of bereavement, but in the priest's recollections, and in Wordsworth's construction of the mariner's meditations, emerge points of shared vocabulary and shared experience with the more lyrical episodes of 'Tintern Abbey' and 'Nutting' (this horizontal cross referencing between figures and genres intimates the 'unboundedness' and 'unstoppability' that Levinson suggests is definitive of subjective experience in an ecological perspective (Levinson 1995, p. 124)). Like Wordsworth, the mariner and his brother as children, 'like roe-bucks […] went bounding o'er the hills' ('The Brothers', l. 273); like Wordsworth, the mariner at sea retreats into inward recollection and visions of past landscape experiences. Yet the verb used to describe the mariner's childhood 'soul' as 'knit to this his native soil' (ibid., l. 294) introduces a chink between this figure and that of the lyrics. Recalling the affective effect of the Cumberland Beggar's 'work' ('the mild necessity of use compels | To acts of love; and habit does the work | Of reason', 'The Cumberland Beggar', l. 91), the childish shepherd is tied into the soil by means of a habitual, workaday activity that brings together natural world and human use. Similarly, it is structured habit that preserves the natural world from the boys' potential plunder: 'The finest Sunday that the Autumn saw, | With all its mealy clusters of ripe nuts, | Could never keep these boys away from church' ('The Brothers'., ll. 265-67).

Without such strictures on his time, the childish Wordsworth meanwhile:

> [S]allied from our cottage-door,
> And with a wallet o'er my shoulder slung,
> A nutting crook in hand, I turn'd my steps
> Towards the distant woods.
>
> ('Nutting', ll. 3-6).

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Nevertheless, his Beggar's disguise (an immersion in fabric) binds the young boy to the other figures, their habitual movements, and the feel of their clothing (one of the mariner's potent memories of home ('The Brothers', ll. 61-2)).[15] Although 'Nutting' has been influentially read by Bate as 'miniature allegory of man's rape of nature' (Bate 1995, p. 67), I follow David Joplin's sense of its 'biocentric turn' (Joplin 1997, p. 22) and seek to extend it. As the boy proceeds to 'forc[e]' his way ever further through 'thorns, and brakes, and brambles' ('Nutting', l. 11) the *Lyrical Ballads*' other habits of dwelling in nature begin to seep into the poem's vocabulary, rhythm and spatial arrangement. The boy emerges into 'A virgin scene!' in which 'the hazels rose | Tall and erect, with milk-white clusters hung' (ibid., ll. 17-19), but, like the shepherd boys, he exercises 'wise restraint' (ibid., l. 21) and this gifts him a temper as though 'bless'd | With sudden happiness beyond all hope' (ibid., ll. 26-27). This blissful moment then precipitates the boy's absorption into natural objects that rehearses the rolling, circling movements of the 'Lucy Poems' (violets, moss, stones). With a gesture of extraordinarily sensuous touch (one feels the shady cool as his cheek touches stone), the boy becomes an uncanny shepherd, bound thus into both lyric and ballad figures of the *Lyrical Ballads*:

> And with my cheek on one of those green stones
> That, fleec'd with moss, beneath the shady trees
> Lay round me scatter'd like a flock of sheep,
> I heard the murmur and the murmuring sound,
>
> ('Nutting', ll. 33-36)

The murmuring repetitions (three times in the space of six lines), the encircling stones, the echoes of the Lucy poems and the structuring assonance (cheek/green/fleec'd/trees;

[15] Wordsworth's disguise suggestively mimics local aristocrat and whig politician John Curwen's (1756-1828), who held the seat for Carlisle during the 1790s. For Curwen, disguise was an act of solidarity: 'To emphasize his concern for his constituents he once appeared in the House of Commons dressed like a Cumberland labourer and carrying a loaf and a cheese under his arms' (*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*).

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foam/stones; moss/flock) – enacting the murmuring in a soundscape that saturates the blank verse restraint with shadowy force – come together to characterise this moment as an 'ordinary affect':

> It is the intensity born of a momentary suspension of narrative, or a glitch in the projects we call things like the self, agency, home, a life. Or a simple stopping. When a still life pops up out of the ordinary, it can come as a shock or as some kind of wake-up call. Or it can be a scene of sheer pleasure---an unnamed condensation of thought and feeling. Or an alibi for all of the violence, inequality and social insanity folded into the open disguise of ordinary things. Or it can be a flight from numbing routine all the self-destructive strategies of carrying on.
> It can turn the self into a dreaming scene, if only for a minute (Stewart, p. 19).

In accordance with the transitory, elusive nature of ordinary affect – and confirming the violence, inequality and social insanity that Stewart finds 'folded into' ordinary things – the moment is a short-lived dreaming scene: the boy rose up 'and dragg'd to earth both branch and bough, with crash | and merciless ravage' ('Nutting', ll. 42-43). In ecological terms, this constitutes a failure to live in the 'bioluminescence' of ordinary affective moments.[16] It is a relapse into instrumental gathering, yield, and gain rather than subsistence and by that way comes alienation from the land.[17] This boy doesn't have the everyday lived experience of the land that the subsistence shepherd does; his rentier class mode rises up to seek profit: 'when from the bower I turn'd away, | Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings' (ll. 48-49).[18] This move troubles the present time of the poem's writing ('unless I now | Confound my present feelings with the past' (ll. 46-47) as Wordsworth seeks to negotiate his regret,

[16] 'Bioluminescence' is the term Donna Haraway uses in her endorsement of Kathleen Stewart's book.
[17] See Harvey's commentary on Arne Naess's 'deep ecology' that declares, 'Experiencing of an environment happens by doing something in it, by living in it' (Harvey 1996, p. 169).
[18] Kelly details Wordsworth's father's work as a land agent to the notoriously powerful Sir James Lowther and Wordsworth's ambivalence towards this connection (pp. 46-48).

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staging in the poem (perhaps as compensation) ‘the ordinary [as] an impasse shaped by crisis in which people find themselves developing skills for adjusting to newly proliferating pressures to scramble for modes of living on’ (Berlant 2011, p. 21). This is one of ‘these scenarios of living on in the ordinary, where subjectivity is depicted as overwhelmed, forced to change, and yet also stuck’ (ibid.).

Such scrambling, Berlant suggests, will ‘always have a backstory and induce a poetic of immanent world making’ (ibid.). The shepherds and spinners of the *Lyrical Ballads* are the ‘backstory’ to ‘Nutting’, just as Wordsworth himself is to the Cockermouth floods. This makes the poem’s pivoting on now/then/in future a manifestation of the immanent world making that might constitute ecological thinking. This way of reading Wordsworth is perhaps a little hazardous, is contentious, and is certainly embryonically partial, but I suggest it as a means of living ecologically with the legacy of Romantic-period writing. This means facing the ideological implications of the seeming comfort of nature/human relations in Wordsworth and remaining attuned to the present conditions in which our readings must take place – conditions whose outcomes are unclear, may never be ‘finished’ and settled, and are ultimately ‘ordinary’ in the sense that ‘the vagueness or the unfinished quality of the ordinary is not so much a deficiency as a resource, like a fog of immanent forces still moving even though so much has already happened and there seems to be plenty that’s set in stone’ (Stewart 2007, p. 127). Reading Wordsworth thus is to find in his poetry the ‘material interractions’ (Foster 2000) that must be ignited if we are to find an eco-poetics that really does release the rhythm of our material existence:

> This is no utopia. Not a challenge to be achieved or an ideal to be realized, but a mode of attunement, a continuous responding to something not quite already given and yet somehow happening (Stewart 2007, p. 127).

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