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1
The Wordsworthian Sonnet Revival: *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807)

It was until fairly recently possible to argue that Wordsworth 'resurrected the sonnet from the virtual oblivion in which it had lain for more than a century and re-established it in a position of eminence', but such assertions have become increasingly implausible.[1] It is now clear that when Wordsworth produced his first sustained exercise in the form in *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807), he was rather belatedly adopting a form that had already been rediscovered and popularised during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Thanks to recent scholarship the story of the sonnet revival has become a familiar one, from the role played by Percy's *Reliques* in disinterring this apparently moribund poetic form to the work of women poets, especially Charlotte Smith, in developing the 'elegiac sonnet' into a vehicle for the articulation of a certain type of intense and personal experience.[2] The sonnets in *Poems in Two Volumes* do not even represent Wordsworth's own first attempt at sonnet-writing; in spite of his claims to the contrary, we now know that he wrote and published sonnets before 1807, and that these sonnets were heavily indebted to the elegiac sonnet tradition that he later disowned. Under these circumstances it seems a severe distortion of literary history to credit Wordsworth with having 'revived' the sonnet, a distortion complicit with the general tendency of literary history to appropriate women's achievements and innovations and reassign them to men. It is, however, still possible to see Wordsworth's intervention in the form in 1807 as a decisive moment in the history of the nineteenth-century sonnet. He did not rediscover the sonnet in any straightforwardly antiquarian sense, but he did produce sonnets which alerted his contemporaries and successors to the latent power and potential of the form. His sonnets hit the resonant frequency of the form, and continued to reverberate for the rest of the nineteenth

century. He summarised and surpassed the achievements of the sonnet-writers of the late eighteenth century with such completeness that he succeeded in transforming potential rivals into largely forgotten precursors. It was, in short, Wordsworth himself who appropriated the form; and the task of literary history is not to replicate (or indeed deprecate) that appropriation, but to try to understand the appeal of the Wordsworthian sonnet for his contemporaries and successors.

In the notes that he dictated to Isabella Fenwick towards the end of his life, Wordsworth gives the following account of the development of his interest in the sonnet:

> In the cottage of Town End, one afternoon in 1801 [1802], my Sister read to me the Sonnets of Milton. I had long been acquainted with them, but I was particularly struck on that occasion by the dignified simplicity and majestic harmony that runs through most of them, – in character so totally different from the Italian, and still more so from Shakespeare's fine Sonnets. I took fire, if I may be allowed to say so, and produced three sonnets the same afternoon, the first I ever wrote except an irregular one at school. Of these three, the only one I distinctly remember is 'I grieved for Buonaparté'. One was never written down: the third, which was, I believe, preserved, I cannot particularise.[3]

His assertion that these sonnets were 'the first [he] ever wrote except an irregular one at school' is, however, somewhat less than the whole truth. His very first published poem was the profoundly un-Miltonic sonnet 'On Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress':

> She wept. – Life's purple tide began to flow
> In languid streams through every thrilling vein;
> Dim were my swimming eyes – my pulse beat slow
> And my full heart was swelled to dear delicious pain.
> Life left my loaded heart, and closing eye;
> A sigh recalled the wanderer to my breast;
> Dear was the pause of life, and dear the sigh
> That called the wanderer home, and home to rest.
> That tear proclaims – in thee each virtue dwells,
> And bright will shine in misery's midnight hour;
> As the soft star of dewy evening tells
> What radiant fires were drowned by day's malignant power,
> That only wait the darkness of the night
> To cheer the wandering wretch with hospitable light.[4]

This is an exemplary elegiac sonnet. In writing about his own response to Helen Maria Williams's response to someone else's distress, Wordsworth illustrates the tendency of this form to feed upon suffering; Miss Williams's tears 'proclaim' her possession of 'virtue', and her response causes the poet's organ of benevolence to dilate under the influence of 'dear delicious pain'. His poem is, moreover, typical of the elegiac sonnet in its formal irregularity. The revival of the term 'sonnet' in the late eighteenth century did not entail any attempt to revive the strict Petrarchan form, with its intricate and closely-wrought rhymes. As Mary Robinson notes with some disdain in the Preface to her *Sappho and Phaon* (1796), '[so] little is rule attended to by many… that I have seen a composition of more than thirty lines, ushered into the world under the name of Sonnet'; and Anne Radcliffe uses the term to describe a pair of elegiac quatrains in her 1790 novel *A Sicilian Romance*.[5] This refusal to adhere to the antique rules of the form was perceived by a number of critics as one of the positive virtues of the new sonnet. A reviewer of the 1786 edition of Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* argues that '[a] very trifling compliment is paid to Mrs Smith when it is observed how much her sonnets exceed those of Shakespeare and Milton' adding that she has 'undoubtedly conferred honour on a species of poetry which most of her predecessors in this country have disgraced.'[6] Similarly Nathan Drake, in his *Literary Hours* of 1798, praises 'Charlotte Smith and Mr. Bowles' for their success in cultivating the sonnet, and in particular for abandoning any vestigial attachment to the Petrarchan origins of the form. By 'assuming the elegiac measure' they have freed the sonnet from the artificial restrictions and limitations which cramped the efforts even of Milton.[7] Wordsworth's is not a radical departure from Miltonic precept – he does not exceed the allotted number of lines – but he allows himself the metrical licence of not one but three Alexandrines (in lines 4, 12 and 14) to mimic the 'swelling' of his feelings and sensibilities in the presence of Miss Williams's suffering.

This sonnet might, of course, be the 'irregular' one Wordsworth claims to have written at school, but it is by no means the only sonnet he wrote or published in the years before 1802. There are at least four other sonnets belonging to this period, and one of these, a translation from Petrarch, was also published.[8] We know, in addition, that he was extremely interested in and even (according to one recent account) obsessed with the work of Charlotte Smith, the originator of the elegiac sonnet: 'As early as 1789, when he was an undergraduate at Cambridge, Wordsworth obtained a copy of the fifth edition of Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets*, in which he made some notes, added his name to a list

of late subscribers, and copied by hand early versions of two sonnets that would not appear until the sixth edition'.[9] Wordsworth visited Smith on his way to France in 1791 in order to procure a letter of introduction to Helen Maria Williams.[10] And, according to Dorothy Wordsworth's Journal, he was still reading Smith's sonnets in 1802, at the very moment when he was claiming to have been converted to the form by Milton's example.[11]

It seems extremely unlikely under these circumstances that Wordsworth could have forgotten his familiarity with the elegiac sonnet, so the most likely explanation of his statement to Isabella Fenwick is that it constitutes a conscious misrepresentation of his past. Some of the reasons for this 'deliberate erasure of the sonnet of Sensibility'[12] from his own personal history are suggested in a letter of November 1802 praising Milton's sonnets and discussing the technical challenges they offer the poet:

> Milton's sonnets… I think manly and dignified compositions, distinguished by simplicity and unity of object and aim, and undisfigured by false or vicious ornaments. They are in several places incorrect, and sometimes uncouth in language, and, perhaps, in some inharmonious; yet, upon the whole, I think the music exceedingly well suited to its end, that is, it has an energetic and varied flow of sound crowding into narrow room more of the combined effect of rhyme and blank verse than can be done by any other kind of verse I know of.[13]

In aligning himself with Milton's 'manly and dignified' sonnets, Wordsworth is attempting to place some distance between himself and the female-dominated elegiac sonnet tradition of the late eighteenth century; and there is no doubt that part of his aim in returning to Milton was to 'remasculinise' the sonnet.[14] Where the elegiac sonnet is emotional, excessive and formally undisciplined, Milton's sonnets are characterised by a properly masculine self-discipline exemplified in their unswerving adherence to the rules of the Petrarchan or 'legitimate' sonnet. Coleridge does something similar when he singles out William Lisle Bowles as his precursor in the elegiac sonnet, and praises the 'mild and manliest melancholy' of his poetry; but, as was so often the case, Wordsworth's gesture is both more comprehensive and more productive than that of his friend.[15] In turning to Milton, Wordsworth is not making small-scale distinctions between elegiac sonnet writers but retrospectively feminising and rejecting them all (his earlier version of himself included) in one sweeping movement.

In this respect, then, Wordsworth seems to participate in the widespread denigration of the cultural products of 'Sensibility' during the most intense years of the conflict with Napoleonic France which saw other genres like the Gothic novel come under suspicion in similar ways. Wordsworth's realignment of his relation to the sonnet tradition cannot, however, simply be labelled reactionary. The phrase 'narrow room', used in the letter cited above, is one which Wordsworth employs repeatedly in connection with the sonnet, and its uses provide some important clues about the attractions of the form for him at this time.[16] Michelangelo's sonnets are difficult to translate because 'so much meaning has been put… into so little room'.[17] And Wordsworth uses the phrase again in the Preface to the 'River Duddon' sonnets of 1820:

> Hail, ancient Manners! sure defence,
> Where they survive, of wholesome laws;
> Remnants of love whose modest sense
> Thus into narrow room withdraws;
> Hail, usages of pristine mould,
> And ye that guard them, Mountains old! (ll. 55–60)

The 'little room' is, in all these instances, a place of safety and refuge during times of adversity. Both Milton and Michelangelo maintained a severe and principled republicanism in the face of extremely hostile political circumstances. In the same way, the valley of the River Duddon, cut off and guarded by the mountains from the march of civilisation, maintains the 'ancient manners' of an earlier and more wholesome period; the 'remnants of love' which these manners represent have withdrawn into 'narrow room' in order to preserve themselves from corruption. These examples of strategic limitation and withdrawal fortify Wordsworth, the republican and revolutionary of the 1790s, when he too finds himself '[on] evil days… fallen, and evil tongues;/ In darkness, and with dangers compassed round'.[18] Entering the 'narrow room' of the sonnet represents a way of sealing himself off from potentially corrupting influences. The form's association with personal authenticity and political radicalism render it an appropriate vehicle for the preservation of 'feelings all too delicate for use' in the current hostile political climate.[19]

Wordsworth's turn towards the Miltonic sonnet is, then, a complex gesture which fuses together a number of contradictory impulses, and its complexity is apparent in the 'Prefatory Sonnet' which he uses to introduce and justify the two sonnet sequences in *Poems in Two*

Volumes. Here the 'narrow room' is both a place of refuge from a perplexing and intractable reality, and an emblem of the paradoxical relation between freedom and imprisonment. The heavily rule-governed Petrarchan or 'legitimate' sonnet becomes an iconic representation of the poet's own freely chosen confinement; both his acquiescence in the rules of the form and his minor creative infractions of them acquire an almost immediate moral and political resonance, reinforcing or counterpointing the poem's explicit discussion of the relative merits of liberty and submission to authority.[20] Moreover, the images used in the poem are carefully chosen to blur the boundary between engagement and withdrawal, indeed to present withdrawal as the most productive form of engagement available at the present moment. The poem attempts to construe these acts of submission and disengagement as temporary expedients; but, as Wordsworth's successors recognised, it also signals a subtle but permanent shift in the poet's outlook. He comes to like the 'narrow room' of the sonnet too much to ever want to leave it, and begins to accommodate his opinions to his new surroundings.[21]

The images in the octave both resist and gesture towards the world of social and political conflict from which the poet claims to be withdrawing:

> Nuns fret not at their Convent's narrow room;
> And Hermits are contented with their Cells;
> And Students with their pensive Citadels:
> Maids at the Wheel, the Weaver at his Loom,
> Sit blithe and happy; Bees that soar for bloom,
> High as the highest Peak of Furness Fells,
> Will murmur by the hour in Foxglove bells:
> In truth, the prison, unto which we doom
> Ourselves, no prison is: and hence to me,
> In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound
> Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground:
> Pleas'd if some Souls (for such there needs must be)
> Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,
> Should find short solace there, as I have found.

To the meditation and prayer of the nun and hermit are added the bookishness and erudition of the students in their 'pensive Citadels'. Unlike his great precursor, Wordsworth apparently can praise a 'fugitive and cloistered virtue', even in wartime.[22] However the word 'Citadel', with its military connotations, incorporates in a very under-

stated way the poet's acknowledgement of the war going on in the real world; the apparently unproductive student is, by a kind of chiasmus, made the guardian of the fortress. There is a similarly understated allusion to the outside world in the figure of the weaver at his loom. The weaver was, at this time, the embodiment of those threatened by the industrialisation of manufacture. During the eighteenth century northern weavers were generally independent, self-employed people who worked for a number of masters or (more commonly) a single master, and enjoyed the status of skilled artisans in the community. During the period 1780–1830, however, their status was 'greatly debased' into that of the 'proletarian outworker, who worked in his own home, sometimes owned and sometimes rented his loom, and who wove up the yarn to the specifications of the factor or agent of a mill or of some middleman. He lost… status and security… [and] was exposed to conditions which were, in the sense of the London artisan, wholly "dishonourable"'.[23] The idealised image of the weaver sitting 'blithe and happy' at his loom is, then, one loaded with ideological significance, a vision of the potential self-sufficiency and contentment of the skilled labourer.[24] The final image of the octave is the most explicit in its combination of the ideas of freedom and limitation, sublimity and beauty; the bees soar to the 'highest Peak of Furness Fells' only to imprison themselves in the foxglove's flowers.[25]

The volta or turn of the sonnet comes in lines 8–9, with the pivotal assertion that 'the prison unto which we doom/ Ourselves, no prison is.' This enjambment across the major structural divide of a strictly observed Petrarchan sonnet becomes a formal (and Miltonically sanctioned) echo of the statement made in the lines themselves.[26] Moreover, in describing the sonnet as a 'scanty plot of ground', Wordsworth once again ushers in the world of social and political conflict which he is ostensibly trying to exclude. The sonnet is the equivalent within the poetic sphere of the 'little tract of land' which, according to Wordsworth, both symbolises and guarantees the moral well-being of society:

> The domestic affections will always be strong amongst men who live in a country not crowded with population, if these men are placed above poverty. But if they are proprietors of small estates, which have descended to them from their ancestors, the power which these affections will acquire amongst such men is inconceivable by those who have only had an opportunity of observing hired labourers, farmers, and the manufacturing poor. Their little tract of land serves as a kind of permanent rallying point for their domestic feelings, as a tablet upon which they are written which makes them

> objects of memory in a thousand instances when they would otherwise be forgotten.[27]

By returning to his 'scanty plot of ground', then, Wordsworth is implicitly demonstrating what can be achieved by the cultivation of these 'domestic affections'. And the poem ends by looking forward to the moment when these carefully preserved and reinvigorated virtues can once again take their rightful place in the life of the nation. The withdrawal and self-restraint praised in the poem provide 'short solace' at a difficult moment; when circumstances are more propitious, the poet can return to untrammelled personal and aesthetic self-determination.

However, the very isolation and self-containment praised in the poem as necessary virtues during a period of extreme reaction establish counter-currents which transform the poet's principles in the act of seeming to preserve them. One of these counter-currents can be glimpsed in the striking indifference to gender displayed by Wordsworth in his choice of images of freely chosen imprisonment in the octave; he is happy to compare himself to a nun and a maid as well as to a student and a hermit. Such indifference to gender suggests that the poet's 'remasculinisation' of the sonnet is not a straightforward matter. By projecting himself into these feminine roles Wordsworth ends up articulating a new and in many ways radically altered version of masculinity, one which includes not just self-restraint and fortitude in adversity, but also domesticity, seclusion and passivity, and in so doing anticipates some of the key features of the 'monastic discourse' which Herbert Sussman identifies as an important vehicle for the analysis of 'the problematics and the contradictory possibilities of manhood' during the Victorian period.[28] And Wordsworth's Victorian successors also saw much to admire in the poem's apparent inversion of the qualities of freedom and restriction. Unlimited freedom comes to be seen as a burden, a restraint, a kind of imprisonment; while submission to authority – even the arbitrary authority of poetic tradition – is increasingly seen as a kind of liberation or release. The poet's joy at casting off 'the weight of too much liberty' is paralleled in another of the poems of 1807, the 'Ode to Duty':

> Me this unchartered freedom tires;
> I feel the weight of chance desires:
> My hopes no more must change their name,
> I long for a repose which ever is the same.
>
> ('Ode to Duty', ll. 37–40)[29]

It is these suggestions of an alternative scale of values which make the Prefatory Sonnet, and indeed the turn towards the Miltonic sonnet which it announces, important elements in Wordsworth's gradual but inexorable transition from youthful radicalism to moralistic conservatism. The sonnets are the crucible in which the 'Victorian' Wordsworth is formed, and they were recognised as such by his Victorian admirers and imitators. In his 1841 review of Wordsworth's sonnets Sir Henry Taylor describes the Prefatory Sonnet as a 'doctrinal poem', and goes on to draw out its message in plain terms:

> [No] enlargement of a man's liberty of action can take place without a corresponding aggravation of his moral responsibility, and… there must needs be some souls which 'feel the weight of too much liberty,' – such, that is, whose liberty of action is disproportionate to their strength of judgment or of self-control, and must therefore either oppress their conscience, or vex them with the perplexities of an undetermined choice or the consequences of an ungoverned will… Such, then, are the views of moral restraint indicated in this poem; and the drift of it is to bring this species of restraint into a comparison mutually illustrative with the restraint imposed by the laws of the sonnet upon an exuberant and discursive imagination. As of the moral will, so of the intellect: as in life, so in art. The law to which the sonnetteer submits himself, substitutes the restraint of a mechanical limitation for restraint by effort of judgment.[30]

Taylor highlights the reflexive dimension of the poem; the rules of the sonnet find their moral equivalent in the notion of duty, which provides the individual with a prefabricated set of moral imperatives. Taylor, indeed, goes on to note the similarities between the Prefatory Sonnet and the 'Ode to Duty', and finds other parallels in Wordsworth's later work, such as this passage from 'The Pass of Kirkstone' (1820):

> And I (as all men may find cause,
> When life is at a weary pause,
> And they have panted up the hill
> Of duty with reluctant will)
> Be thankful, even though tired and faint,
> For the rich bounties of constraint;
> Whence oft invigorating transports flow
> That choice lacked courage to bestow! (ll. 53–60)

In reading the Prefatory Sonnet as a 'doctrinal' poem, however, Taylor omits any sense of its delicate balance of forces; and a similarly coarsened or simplified response can be seen in Leigh Hunt's observations on the poem:

> It is a very bold general proposition to say that 'nuns fret not at their narrow rooms' and that 'hermits are content with their cells'. Thousands of nuns, there is no doubt, have fretted horribly, and do fret; and hermitages have proved so little satisfactory, that we no longer hear of their existence in civilised countries. We are to suppose, however, that the poet alludes only to such nuns and hermits as have been willing to be solitary. So also in regard to the spinning maids, and the weavers. The instances are not thoroughly happy; for the spinning and the weaving are too often anything but voluntary, however cheerfully made the best of.[31]

Writing during the 1850s, Hunt seems oblivious to the possibility that Wordsworth might have intended us to notice the ambiguity of his 'instances' in the octave. His Wordsworth is the sage and moraliser who presided over and sanctified the pieties of Victorian England, not the perplexed revolutionary caught at a moment of transition between two selves.

In the 1807 volume the Prefatory Sonnet introduces two series of sonnets: the 'Miscellaneous Sonnets' and the 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty'. In grouping his sonnets together in this way, even under the heading 'Miscellaneous', Wordsworth departs from Miltonic precept and indicates a residual allegiance to the elegiac sonnet tradition. Milton's sonnets are autonomous and free-standing entities; the liberation of the individual sonnet from the Petrarchan sequence is one of the most significant aspects of Milton's legacy for Wordsworth. And he imitates Milton to the extent that each of his poems is robust enough to stand alone without the support of a sequence, as the frequency with which individual sonnets from these two series have been anthologised indicates. However, unlike Milton, Wordsworth remains highly sensitive to the possibility of interaction between individual sonnets, and it is this sensitivity which leads to his restless grouping and regrouping of them into different formations. A number of the 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty' first appeared (in a different order) in the *Morning Chronicle* during 1802–3, and seem in that incarnation to form a series with what

Alan Liu calls 'a calculated interlacing of theme and imagery'.[32] There is, moreover, some evidence that the 'Westminster Bridge' sonnet was originally part of a series of poems commemorating Wordsworth's visit to Calais in 1802, and that it was separated from the other 'Calais Tour' sonnets in a typically Wordsworthian act of repression and displacement designed to obscure his personal engagement with the public events discussed in the other poems.[33] The 1807 ordering is not definitive either; both series are broken up, recast and assimilated to larger groupings in Wordsworth's later work. This obsessive revisiting and recasting of the legacy of the past gives the poems something like an organic connection to Wordsworth's life – each new constellation reveals new aspects of familiar experiences and connections between apparently disparate events – and its most obvious precursor is Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets*, which went through a similar process of revision and expansion throughout her career.

To describe the 'Miscellaneous Sonnets' and the 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty' as 'sequences' is, then, somewhat misleading, as it implies a degree of premeditation and formal organisation which neither possesses.[34] Both work, rather, by exploiting what Wordsworth calls 'lurking affinities' between different sonnets to produce an oblique record of the poet's endless re-examination and revision of his personal history.[35] Alan Liu suggests that Wordsworth is drawn to the Miltonic sonnet at this period because it allows him to articulate his conflicting impulses; the form 'virtually demands thematic opposition between octet [sic] and sestet', and so enables him to stage arguments between the different aspects of himself. But Liu adds that this form is 'especially suited to reifying turns of mind', and 'tends to freeze the antithetical moment into glacial composure'.[36] Wordsworth's 'elegiac' use of the Miltonic sonnet, however, introduces an element of fluidity and instability beneath this apparently immobile surface; the connections he establishes within and between the two series of poems allow them to become a living record of these contradictions and unresolved tensions rather than simply a monument to them.

The twenty 'Miscellaneous Sonnets' have little obvious connection with one another; personal reminiscences and observations are mingled with sonnets 'To Sleep' and translations from Michelangelo. They are, as the first of them makes clear, avowedly products of the 'Fancy' rather than the imagination, and therefore 'as capricious as the accidents of things' in their choice of subject matter:[37]

How sweet it is, when mother Fancy rocks
The wayward brain, to saunter through a wood!
An old place, full of many a lovely brood,
Tall trees, green arbours, and ground flowers in flocks;
And Wild rose tip-toe upon hawthorn stocks,
Like to a bonny Lass, who plays her pranks
At Wakes and Fairs with wandering Mountebanks,
When she stands cresting the Clown's head, and mocks
The crowd beneath her. Verily I think
Such place to me is sometimes like a dream
Or map of the whole world: thoughts, link by link
Enter through ears and eyesight, with such gleam
Of all things, that at last in fear I shrink,
And leap at once from the delicious stream.

Jennifer Ann Wagner uses this poem to illustrate what she calls the 'synecdochic' relation between the sonnet and the epic; the sonnet is construed as containing a 'miniature version' of the 'visionary gleam' which it is the job of Wordsworth's more ambitious poems to explore at length.[38] But this reading overlooks the fact that what we see in this poem is not an embracing of the 'visionary gleam' but a turning away from it. The emphasis throughout is on precisely that 'wayward' or (to use a word Wordsworth uses in talking about one of the other 'Miscellaneous Sonnets') 'wanton' power of the mind to make forced links between disparate objects characteristic of the fancy rather than the imagination.[39] The poet's 'wayward' brain is 'rocked' by 'mother Fancy' as he wanders through a wood, and the immediate product of this state is a highly fanciful image of the wild rose as a young girl looking down at a crowd from behind a clown's head at a country fair. When, however, the characteristic Wordsworthian vocabulary of visionary experience begins to appear in the sestet – 'link by link', 'gleam' – the poet, prompted by 'fear', beats a hasty retreat from this 'stream' of thought. The poem is determined to remain within its self-assigned limits. There is a similar emphasis on playfulness and the refusal or avoidance of the higher imaginative powers in 'Beloved Vale!' (sonnet 15) which deals with one of the commonplaces of the elegiac sonnet tradition, the 'revisit' to a place of significance.[40] In some of Wordsworth's poetry this 'revisit' motif yields moments of profound insight, but in this instance there is no visionary gleam: 'no fears/ Distress'd me; I look'd round, I shed no tears;/ Deep thought or awful vision I had none' (ll. 6–8). In the absence of the imaginative sublime, the 'fancy' has licence to play across the poet's mind;

the trees of his childhood become '[mere] dwarfs', and the rest of the landscape is reduced to 'Juggler's Balls old Time about him toss'd' (ll. 11, 12). This underlying metaphor (or 'underthought', to use Hopkins's terminology) of the circus is shared by both sonnets, and strongly suggests that the sonnet is not the appropriate medium for the exercise of the most exalted powers of the mind. Wordsworth's ambivalence about the status of the sonnet was to be one of his most enduring and troubling legacies for his nineteenth-century successors in the form.

Beneath this surface miscellaneousness it is, however, possible to detect some common themes and motifs which give shape and direction to the group. The three translations 'From the Italian of Michelangelo', for example, reiterate the Prefatory Sonnet's implicit equation between submission to the rules of the sonnet and moral self-restraint. They put forward a severe and uncompromising asceticism; the soul expresses its desire to soar beyond the visible world and discover the spiritual: 'For what delights the sense is false and weak,/ Ideal Form, the universal mould' (11, ll. 7–8). This 'universal mould' is, of course, imaged in the 'Ideal Form' of the sonnet itself; and Michael Angelo's submission to it is all the more impressive given the evident capacity to respond to the world of the senses provided by his work in the visual arts.[41] Similarly, in sonnet 17, 'To the —', the poet implicitly compares the activity of sonnet writing to the framing of beds for winter flowers during the early days of spring, an image which has a 'lurking affinity' with the Prefatory Sonnet's representation of the form as a 'scanty plot of ground'. Such structures are, the poem suggests, appropriate for times when 'the sun of life more feebly shines', and promise thoughts of 'solemn gloom' to their inhabitants. Moreover, as in the Prefatory Sonnet, this submission to the rules of the form is more than simply a temporary expedient; the poem ends with the idea that the 'perennial bowers', in spite of their less immediately attractive appearance, might eventually prove as 'gracious as the music and the bloom/ And all the mighty ravishment of Spring'. Far from being simply a 'short solace' during unpropitious times, the certainties of the sonnet might become for the poet a permanent shelter even when the longed-for spring has returned. This theme of self-restraint is also explored in the poem 'To the Memory of Raisley Calvert', the last of the 'Miscellaneous Sonnets'. Calvert was a friend of Wordsworth's who died at the age of 21 in 1795, leaving the poet a legacy of £900 so that he could devote himself to poetry. The 'early liberty' which this gave the poet was, however, a paradoxical and 'frugal' liberty which found its highest expression in self-denial:

> This care was thine when sickness did condemn
> Thy youth to hopeless wasting, root and stem;
> That I, if frugal and severe, might stray
> Where'er I liked… (ll. 4–7)

The poet could 'stray/ Where'er [he] lik'd'; but the very existence of this sonnet, and indeed the poet's voluntary subjection to the sonnet form, illustrate how willing he is to be appropriately 'frugal and severe' in the enjoyment of his liberty. And throughout the collection there is an emphasis, consistent with the Prefatory Sonnet, on remaining within limits and boundaries. The poet is anxious at the sight of ships about to set sail for unknown foreign lands, and wishes them in a 'Haven' rather than on the perilous sea (2, l. 9). Even the sonnets addressed to Sleep, which might be seen as the most obviously derivative in the collection, drawing as they do on one of the commonplaces of the Renaissance sonnet, praise sleep as a 'blessed barrier twixt day and day' (6, l. 13) and as '[a] Captive never wishing to be free' (5, l. 4).

In the second of the sonnets 'To Sleep' the poet tries to lull himself into unconsciousness by thinking about an image from the Prefatory Sonnet: 'A flock of sheep that leisurely pass by,/ One after one; the sound of rain, and bees/ Murmuring…' (ll. 1–3). This typifies the tendency of the 'Miscellaneous Sonnets' to recycle and amplify one another's images and motifs; and the poem in which this kind of allusion is most obvious is the sonnet 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge'. This much anthologised and endlessly imitated poem, probably the most famous sonnet of the nineteenth century, perfectly illustrates the ineradicable tension between the individual sonnet and the series in Wordsworth's writing. Its ability to survive without the other poems in its group – whether we take that group to be the 'Miscellaneous Sonnets' or the reconstructed 'Calais Tour' to which Liu assigns it – is self-evident, and yet reinsertion into these contexts adds resonance to almost all of its features:

> Earth has not anything to shew more fair:
> Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
> A sight so touching in it's majesty:
> This City now doth like a garment wear
> The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
> Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
> Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
> All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.

> Never did sun more beautifully steep
> In his first splendor valley, rock, or hill;
> Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
> The river glideth at his own sweet will:
> Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
> And all that mighty heart is lying still!

The list of features in line 6 looks at first like the product of observation, in a poem which owes a great deal to the 'loco-descriptive' and meditative sonnets of late-eighteenth-century sonnet-writers like Bowles. Yet the '[ships]' also recall sonnets 2 and 8, and look forward (as we shall see below) to the various uses of the motifs of sailing and seafaring in the 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty'; the 'towers' look back to the 'pensive Citadels' of the students in the Prefatory sonnet; the 'domes' are associated with Michelangelo, architect of St Peter's in Rome; while a 'Grecian Temple' features in the two sonnets dealing with the journey across the Hamilton hills taken by Wordsworth on the day of his marriage.[42] Moreover, the poem as a whole allocates a new place to London within the symbolic economy of his poetry. In *Lyrical Ballads* and in the (as yet unpublished) *Prelude*, London is represented as a place of social and personal disintegration, the very antithesis of the stable and knowable rural community which represented for Wordsworth the source of civic virtue. This association of London with corruption is obscurely but powerfully connected with the influence of London on Wordsworth himself; London was the place where he learned his political radicalism and associated himself with people sympathetic to the aims of the French Revolution.[43] In 'Westminster Bridge', however, London is presented far more positively. It is not only compared to natural phenomena, but is more beautiful than 'valley, rock or hill' in the early morning light; it earns the magical Wordsworthian epithet 'glittering'; and the river Thames 'glideth at his own sweet will', unforced by the pace of industry or commerce. Far from being a cancerous growth on the healthy body of the nation, London is seen as its 'mighty heart'. Perhaps most interestingly, Wordsworth commends the 'majesty' of the city. This word is always loaded with political significance; to anticipate for a moment, the second of the 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty' condemns the French people for rushing to celebrate Napoleon's 'new-born Majesty'. The use of the term in 'Westminster Bridge' has about it a studied political neutrality; the 'majesty' inheres in the people and the city, not in any individual; but it nevertheless leaves open the possibility of an identification of the two kinds of majesty.

As this poem makes clear, there is a latent political dimension to the 'Miscellaneous Sonnets'; the images developed in them leak into and colour the 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty', reinforcing and occasionally contradicting the overt political message of the latter. Wordsworth seems to have regarded the 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty' as the more unified and integrated of the two groups, even going so far as to describe it as a single connected poem:

> [The sonnets] to Liberty, at least, have a connection with, or a bearing upon, each other, and therefore, if individually they want weight, perhaps, as a Body, they may not be so deficient, at least this ought to induce you to suspend your judgement, and qualify it so far as to allow that the writer aims at least at comprehensiveness. But dropping this, I would boldly say at once, that these Sonnets, while they each fix the attention upon some important sentiment separately considered, do at the same time collectively make a Poem on the subject of civil Liberty and national independence, which, either for simplicity of style or grandeur of moral sentiment, is, alas! likely to have few parallels in the Poetry of the present day.[44]

In these sonnets Wordsworth presents himself as nurturing and preserving a national tradition of virtuous republicanism derived, above all, like the sonnets themselves, from the work and example of Milton; but this representation merges insensibly with a puritanical, nationalistic and ultimately conservative rhetoric. England is both admonished for failing to live up to its heritage, and celebrated as a haven of liberty in a Europe increasingly dominated by Napoleonic tyranny. The series translates into overtly political terms the fundamental paradox of the Prefatory Sonnet, praising the self-restraint and acceptance of the 'lowliest duties' necessary during the national emergency of the war with Napoleonic France as manifestations of the highest and most enduring form of liberty.

The Prefatory Sonnet is, as we have seen, designed to emphasise the peculiar appropriateness of the sonnet form for the task of articulating the benefits of the voluntary renunciation of freedom. This inbuilt resonance can be heard in the background of many of the 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty'. The sonnet beginning 'There is a bondage which is worse to bear', for instance, contrasts the misery of imprisonment with the much worse misery of those who 'must wear/ Their fetters in their Souls':

For who could be,
Who, even the best, in such condition, free
From self-reproach, reproach which he must share
With Human Nature? (ll. 6–9)

The word 'free' at the end of the line is allowed to release its full range of connotations before being reined in by the adjectival phrase which follows it, reiterating the poem's message that the ability to '[walk] about in the open air' is not, in itself, a guarantee of genuine freedom. Moreover, the rhyme on the word 'free' represents a licence within the Petrarchan sonnet; we should, in lines 6 and 7, be continuing the forbidding rhyme 'wall/ thrall', but Wordsworth allows the poem to break free of this convention in order to emphasise the liberty that can still be achieved by someone 'who breathes, by roof, and floor, and wall,/ Pent in'. The Miltonically sanctioned overflowing of the octave/ sestet division is, in a by-now familiar gesture, employed to emphasise the message that true freedom is compatible with certain forms of confinement.

Wordsworth suggests throughout these sonnets that it is France that has changed, not him; he is keen to stress the continuities between the different versions of himself, and equally keen to stress the French people's willingness to ignore or override the logic of organic growth. This is the key to Wordsworth's condemnation of Napoleon, or rather of the French people for their unseemly willingness to participate in Napoleon's apotheosis. In the second sonnet – headed 'Calais, August, 1802' – Wordsworth reflects on the overwhelming popular vote which allowed Napoleon to assume the title of First Consul for Life. He accuses the French people, in a resounding pun, of being 'to slavery prone', and castigates them for their willingness to worship the 'new-born Majesty'. This phrase deliberately parallels the 'new-born Liberty' remembered and celebrated in the next sonnet (3, l. 4); it also recalls (by contrast) the politically neutral but sublime 'majesty' of London celebrated in the 'Westminster Bridge' sonnet. This weakness in the French people derives from a failure to distinguish between mere prostration before power and the loyal virtue of 'seemly reverence' that cannot be 'sown in haste' or spring up overnight. Sudden change is compared unfavourably with gradual, nature-like transformation; the private and domestic spheres are the 'stalk/ True power doth grow on' (4, ll. 13–14). The use of organic tropes to undermine the rhetoric of revolution was, of course, one of Burke's most successful strategies in

his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*; and Wordsworth might seem to be aligning himself here with an explicitly counterrevolutionary discourse. But he is criticising France not (as Burke did) for having a revolution at all, but for failing to live up to the ideals of its revolution. The sonnet 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture', for instance, and the following one describing the fate of a 'Negro Woman driv'n from France', both emphasise the extent of the French government's apostasy. The rhetoric of liberty, equality and fraternity has given way to a reinstatement of the most barbarous and unjustifiable forms of discrimination against fellow human beings; the proneness to slavery imaged in the submission to Napoleon has resulted in the revival of the institution itself. France has not allowed its revolution to mature into full liberty.

The poet's attitude towards Britain is altogether more complex and ambivalent, but again there is a strong suggestion that Wordsworth's patriotism is continuous and even identical with his earlier Jacobinism. Some of the sonnets paint an idyllic and sentimentalised portrait of 'England' ideally suited to the task of generating national sentiment. The tenth sonnet, 'Composed in the Valley, near Dover, On the Day of landing', celebrates an England of small villages and boys playing cricket, and explicitly contrasts English freedom with the fact that 'Europe is still in Bonds'.[45] Similarly the poems written during the invasion scare of late 1803 occasionally employ a deliberately archaic diction designed to emphasise the origins of English liberty in an idealised medieval past:

> Vanguard of Liberty, ye Men of Kent,
> Ye children of a soil that doth advance
> Its haughty brow against the coast of France,
> Now is the time to prove your hardiment!
> To France be words of invitation sent!
> They from their Fields can see the countenance
> Of your fierce war, may ken the glittering lance,
> And hear you shouting forth your brave intent.
> Left single, in bold parley, Ye, of yore,
> Did from the Norman win a gallant wreath;
> Confirm'd the charters that were yours before; –
> No parleying now! In Britain is one breath;
> We are all with you now from Shore to Shore: –
> Ye Men of Kent, 'tis Victory or Death!

Wordsworth is, of course, invoking the Norman invasion of 1066 in this sonnet, and attempting to mitigate the unfortunate aspects of this parallel by alluding to the tradition that the Men of Kent east of the

Medway remained unconquered by the Normans. This invocation of the Saxon/ Norman conflict is, however, slightly more complex and politically ambivalent than it at first sight appears. During the early 1790s Wordsworth was almost certainly in contact with the Society for Constitutional Information, an organisation established to promote political discussion and to press for constitutional reform. One of the tenets of the SCI's creed was the idea that 'the "great Founders" of the English constitution were the Saxons, but the yoke of "arbitrary kings" since the Norman Conquest had destroyed its former charters and liberties'.[46] 'Charters' is a word that Wordsworth uses frequently, often, as here, in close connection with the language of political and civil liberty; it signifies a controlled and orderly liberty, not the 'unchartered freedom' lamented in the 'Ode to Duty'. The historical allusion in this sonnet is, then, nicely poised between two types of 'patriotism'; a new celebration of England and Englishness, and a continuing adherence to the old radical creed.[47] The Men of Kent are the embodiment of English patriotism and warlike spirit, and at the same time the defenders of the ancient liberties of the English constitution against monarchical usurpers. Seen in this latter context, Napoleon begins to appear simply the latest in a long line of such usurpers, and the critique of Napoleon becomes continuous with the radical rhetoric of Wordsworth's earlier self.

Throughout the 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty', Britain is both the bulwark of liberty – 'the only light/ Of Liberty that yet remains on Earth!' (18, ll. 13–14) – and the target of Wordsworth's increasingly stern moral admonition for its failure to live up to its own heritage of liberty. This ambivalence is woven into the metaphorical fabric of the sonnets. The opening sonnet of the collection sees the poet standing on the sea-front near Calais and looking back longingly towards his own 'dear Country'. In a typically Wordsworthian manoeuvre, this gesture is mediated by reflections on the 'Fair Star of Evening', which seems to the poet to have become the 'Star of my Country' and 'a glorious crest/ Conspicuous to the Nations':

> Thou, I think,
> Should'st be my Country's emblem; and should'st wink,
> Bright star! with laughter on her banners, drest
> In thy fresh beauty. There! that dusky spot
> Beneath thee, it is England: there it lies. (ll. 6–10)

The star should be the emblem of Britain – it should, indeed, takes its place on Britain's flag. There were, of course, stars on the flag of the recently founded American Republic, a Republic often seen as the har-

binger of the French Revolution and indeed of democratic reform throughout Europe. In the last line and a half of this extract Wordsworth almost seems to be urging the star to recognise its true home; the 'dusky spot' of England needs the guidance of the star, but does not, at the moment, seem to have it. The poem, then, implies that Britain needs to change in order to become worthy of the emblem; and the kind of change required is indicated most clearly in 'London, 1802':

> Milton! thou should'st be living at this hour:
> England hath need of thee: she is a fen
> Of stagnant waters: altar, sword and pen,
> Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
> Have forfeited their ancient English dower
> Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
> Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
> And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
> Thy soul was like a star and dwelt apart:
> Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea;
> Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
> So didst thou travel on life's common way,
> In chearful godliness; and yet thy heart
> The lowliest duties on itself did lay.

Milton is the 'star' whose soul 'dwelt apart' from his selfish fellow countrymen; but it is not Milton the republican and apologist for regicide who is celebrated here so much as Milton the Puritan. The first surprise in this sonnet comes in the sixth line, a surprise emphasised by the full stop at what seems an oddly disruptive moment in the sonnet. One might expect the 'ancient English dower' forfeited by Wordsworth and his contemporaries to be freedom, but instead it is the curiously anodyne 'inward happiness'. Milton is charged with giving us back our 'freedom' a few lines later, but the word is concealed in a list of moral qualities: 'manners', 'virtue', and 'power'. The Milton of the sestet, for all his metaphorical majesty, is a stoical figure who '[travels] on life's common way' and accepts the 'lowliest duties' with 'chearful godliness'. The political implications of Wordsworth's invocation of Milton are, then, muted and transformed by the emphasis on his moral and personal qualities.

These complexities are underscored by frequent internal allusion of the kind seen in the 'Westminster Bridge' sonnet. The sonnet to Milton, for instance, gestures with almost telegraphic abruptness towards the nation's heritage in its third line: 'altar, sword and pen' signify respectively the church, the hereditary knighthood, and the ancient universities. It is the voluntary forfeiture of their birthright by these estates which signifies the moral bankruptcy of the nation; hence (to return to the Prefatory Sonnet) the need for students to remain in their 'pensive Citadels' and not 'desert/ The Student's bower for gold' (17, ll. 3–4). The most striking example of this kind of 'lurking affinity' occurs in the twenty-first sonnet:

> England! the time is come when thou shouldst wean
> Thy heart from its emasculating food;
> The truth should now be better understood;
> Old things have been unsettled; we have seen
> Fair seed-time, better harvest might have been
> But for thy trespasses; and, at this day,
> If for Greece, Egypt, India, Africa,
> Aught good were destined, Thou wouldst step between.
> England! all nations in this charge agree:
> But worse, more ignorant in love and hate,
> Far, far more abject is thine Enemy:
> Therefore the wise pray for thee, though the freight
> Of thy offences be a heavy weight:
> Oh grief! that Earth's best hopes all rest with Thee!

The note of residual radicalism is dominant here. England is charged with numerous 'trespasses' which have prevented its '[fair] seed-time' from ripening into a 'better harvest' – an ominous interruption of the natural order of things. Chief among these seems to be its treatment of foreign and especially non-European countries attempting to liberate themselves; England would 'step between' if any good were intended for these countries in order to preserve its own commercial and financial interests irrespective of the higher claims of morality and justice. The sestet's conclusion that England remains the best hope of the world because France is far worse is given additional force by the unobtrusive word 'freight', which encapsulates Wordsworth's ambivalence towards his own country. It represents the culmination of the

motif of ships and seafaring which spans both groups of sonnets, subtly transforming one of the key elements in Wordsworth's symbolic vocabulary and mitigating the force of the poet's condemnation of his own country. In Wordsworth's previous collection, *Lyrical Ballads*, seafaring functions as an emblem of alienation and rootlessness, and is inextricably linked to the largely seaborne war against France. To give just two examples: in 'The Female Vagrant' the 'noisy drum' of the recruiting officer beats round 'to sweep the streets of want and pain', leading directly to the heroine's eventual destitution (ll. 93–4); while in 'The Brothers' the hero Leonard loses his connection to his place of origin and ends up 'a Seaman, a grey-headed Mariner' (l. 449). In the 'Miscellaneous Sonnets', however, Wordsworth begins the process of replacing these negative connotations with more positive ones. The second, 'Where lies the Land to which yon Ship must go?', indicates a certain anxiety at the idea of seafaring, a 'reverential fear', which the poet attempts to counteract by loading the ship with Shakespearean epithets; it is '[as] vigorous as a Lark at break of day', a 'joyous Bark' (ll. 3, 14). In number 8, 'With ships the sea was sprinkled far and nigh', the ships are compared to stars, the highest metaphorical honour in Wordsworth's gift, and the poet's praise of them is not undermined by any reference to fear or trepidation. These sonnets pave the way for the overt identification of the sea with British freedom in the 'Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty'. The 'Thoughts… on the Subjugation of Switzerland', for instance, praise Britain and Switzerland as the voices of freedom emanating from the sea and the mountains respectively; 'London, 1802' describes Milton, the brightest star in Wordsworth's poetic firmament, as having had 'a Voice whose sound was like the sea'; and the sixteenth sonnet, 'It is not to be thought of ', speaks of 'the Flood/ Of British freedom' (ll. 1–2) and of the sea as a 'Road by which all might come and go that would,/ And bear out freights of worth to foreign lands' (ll. 5–6). The reference to the 'freight' of Britain's offences in 'England! the time is come' is, then, very delicately poised between these two opposing senses. The word refers both to the benign process of traffic and commerce, to the carrying of 'freights of worth to foreign lands', and also to the identification of the sea with the misuse of British power for selfish ends.

Wordsworth's rehabilitation of the sonnet in *Poems in Two Volumes* was widely recognised and applauded by his contemporaries. Even Francis Jeffrey, editor of the *Edinburgh Review* and one of Wordsworth's severest critics, exempted the sonnets from his general accusation that the collection was guilty of an 'open violation of the established laws of poetry':

> All English writers of sonnets have imitated Milton; and, in this way, Mr. Wordsworth, when he writes sonnets, escapes again from the trammels of his own unfortunate system; and the consequence is, that his sonnets are as much superior to the greater part of his other poems, as Milton's sonnets are superior to his.[48]

Wordsworth himself, moreover, far from finding 'short solace' in the form, was prompted by the success of this venture to make the sonnet one of his most important and enduring modes of expression. Yet he also bequeathed to his successors a legacy of uncertainty about the value of the form itself. The tension between the limitations of the form and the sublimity of the experiences he wishes to record in it leads him occasionally to 'o'erflow the measure', and point towards his own eventual resumption of higher and more ambitious personal and poetic projects.[49] One such moment takes place in the sonnet 'To the River Duddon':

> O mountain Stream! the Shepherd and his Cot
> Are privileg'd Inmates of deep solitude:
> Nor would the nicest Anchorite exclude
> A field or two of brighter green, or Plot
> Of tillage-ground, that seemeth like a spot
> Of stationary sunshine: thou hast view'd
> These only, Duddon! with their paths renew'd
> By fits and starts, yet this contents thee not.
> Thee hath some awful Spirit impell'd to leave,
> Utterly to desert, the haunts of men,
> Though simple thy Companions were and few;
> And through the wilderness a passage cleave,
> Attended but by thy own Voice, save when
> The Clouds and Fowls of the air thy way pursue.

The river here becomes an image of an asceticism so complete that an inversion of values takes place, and what begins as voluntary renunciation becomes heroic self-sacrifice. In the octave we return to the 'scanty plot of ground' of the Prefatory Sonnet, but even this meagre allotment is too opulent for the River Duddon, which is compelled by an 'awful Spirit… Utterly to desert, the haunts of men'. The river becomes a kind of voice crying in the wilderness. This shift is mirrored in the form of the sonnet. There are few Wordsworthian sonnets in which the break between octave and sestet is so complete; the sestet literally 'leaves' the octave behind, adopting a Miltonic cadence and

prophetic tone far removed from the latter's homely vocabulary. The approach towards sublimity seems to be putting the sonnet form under some strain; and it is, perhaps, not surprising to find that Wordsworth literally overflowed the boundaries of the sonnet form in this case, eventually making this sonnet the source of an entirely new lyric sequence following the course of the river to the sea.[50]

There is another and perhaps even more significant example of 'overflowing' in a poem which Wordsworth did not feel able to place within either of the two sonnet series in *Poems in Two Volumes*, 'It is no Spirit who from Heaven hath flown':

> It is no Spirit who from Heaven hath flown,
> And is descending on his embassy;
> Nor Traveller gone from Earth the Heavens to espy!
> 'Tis Hesperus – there he stands with glittering crown,
> First admonition that the sun is down!
> For yet it is broad day-light: clouds pass by;
> A few are near him still – and now the sky,
> He hath it to himself – 'tis all his own.
> O most ambitious star! an inquest wrought
> Within me when I recognised thy light;
> A moment I was startled at the sight:
> And, while I gazed, there came to me a thought
> That I might step beyond my natural race
> As thou seem'st now to do; might one day trace
> Some ground not mine; and, strong her strength above,
> My Soul, an Apparition in the place,
> Tread there, with steps that no one shall reprove!

Meditating on the appearance of Hesperus, the 'most ambitious star', Wordsworth feels the urge to 'step beyond' the limits allotted to him; and this thought naturally manifests itself in a transgression of the boundaries of the sonnet. This transgression is, like most of Wordsworth's innovations, sanctioned by Milton, whose sonnet 'On the New Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament' represents the most famous example of the 'tailed' or 'caudated' sonnet in English.[51] Wordsworth, however, does not use this form for its traditional satirical purpose, but to announce his intention to leave behind this kind of voluntary self-limitation. The fifteenth line begins with the phrase 'some ground not mine'; the poet has stepped beyond the limits of the 'scanty plot of ground' to which he had previously confined himself,

and is ready to resume his highest poetic ambitions. Moreover, in this imagined future, the poet will be free to tread this new ground 'with steps that no one shall reprove'; his transgression of the allotted limits will not be construed as dangerous licence.

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