Wordsworth and America

19 Dove Cottage Manuscript a/Peabody/3. Unless otherwise noted, future citation of Peabody manuscript may be assumed to be from this source. Other references to manuscripts in the Wordsworth Library will be noted in the text as (WLMS).
20 WLMS a/Channing /1.
26 See the final chapter of Stephen Gill’s *Wordsworth and the Victorians*.
Textual issues

Students of Wordsworth are confronted with an unusual array of different editions, especially of the poetry, which represent much more than commercial competition. Some of the leading issues in contemporary textual criticism have been pioneered in the conception of these editions as they have progressively sought to redefine the poet’s works. So much is this so that an informed choice of texts must nowadays be the basis of any serious engagement with Wordsworth’s writings.

The prevailing questions have been long standing. Wordsworth’s extraordinary lifelong habits of constant revision presented his nineteenth-century editors with the problem of judging the relative status of many considerably variant readings and versions. Though his final intentions were authoritatively registered in his latest edition of Poetical Works, 1849–50, those readings indirectly efface previously completed works which had in many cases already produced a separate history of reception. Also, from Poems, 1815 the poet arranged his poems according to a psychological or subject focus system which for the most part ignored a chronological reading. While Edward Dowden followed Wordsworth’s final wishes in respect of versions and arrangement (the ‘Aldine’, 1892–3), as did Thomas Hutchinson in his edition of Poetical Works (the ‘Oxford’, 1895), William Knight attempted to reconstruct a chronological ordering in his (1882–9; the ‘Eversley’, revised and corrected, 1896), though the dates of composition were often uncertain, and yet to retain the final versions for the main texts.

In the twentieth century Ernest de Selincourt’s collected edition (the ‘Clarendon’, 1941–9; revised by Darbishire 1952–9), adhered to the Dowden/Hutchinson line, (though lengthy unpublished fragments were printed in the editors’ notes, and manuscript and other variants were copiously included) by the University of Human Development
accuracy of manuscript transcription. A much more active editorial intervention in Wordsworth’s own determinations for the presentation of his texts, however, has been widely practised. A crucial departure was de Selincourt’s 1926 parallel-text edition of two versions of *The Prelude*, one completed in 1805 and the other published in 1850. The extended introduction to the revised edition by Helen Darbishire (1959) on the poem’s composition, revision, and ideas (comparing the pros and cons of both versions) was foundational for much subsequent discussion. Then a more radical view of the implications that had been awakened began to emerge. In *The Music of Humanity*, 1969, Jonathan Wordsworth, developing de Selincourt’s practice for *The Prelude*, took the further step of printing separate versions of *The Ruined Cottage* and ‘The Pedlar’ from manuscript, thereby disintegrating Book 1 of *The Excursion* as it had been first published in 1814 and republished during the poet’s lifetime.

The recovery/invention of these unpublished versions drew attention to the particular nature and methods of Wordsworth’s composition, and it prompted a debate about the relative qualities of different versions which became a leading critical issue, especially following the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 3rd edn, vol. 2, edited by M. H. Abrams et al., 1974, which included the first widely available publication of Jonathan Wordsworth’s 1969 text of *The Ruined Cottage* together with an even more significant first publication of what was now named ‘the two-part Prelude’ of 1798–9, arguably the poem’s first stabilized version, edited by Jonathan Wordsworth and Stephen Gill.

The culmination of the new self-consciously recuperative approach to editing Wordsworth came with its principled extension to many other works in *The Cornell Wordsworth Edition*, 1975–, the most elaborate presentation to date of any writer in English, under the general editorship of Stephen Parrish. *The Prelude* was the first work to have become obviously transformed. Parrish’s own 1977 Cornell volume, *The Prelude, 1798–99, By William Wordsworth*, which included a reading text with facing transcriptions of the many contributing MSS, challenged the determinacy of even the recently recovered first version, and the currency of the new editing was then widely spread by the much used and influential *Norton Critical Edition of The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, 1979, textually edited by (Jonathan) Wordsworth and Gill (see Individual poems and collections below), which printed reading texts for the first time in three separate versions, including that of 1850 ‘as Wordsworth left it, freed from the alterations and intrusions of his executors’.
Reed’s *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, 2 vols., 1991, which presented a reading text of the poem as Wordsworth completed it in 1805–6, and a reading text of a manuscript that was extensively revised in 1818–20.

Parrish’s foreword to the Cornell series explained its ambition ‘to present – for the first time – full and accurate texts of Wordsworth’s long poems, together with all variant readings from first drafts down to the final lifetime (or first posthumous) printings’. The inaugural edition was Gill’s *The Salisbury Plain Poems*, 1975, incorporating reading texts of different manuscript versions together with the only text that was actually authorized by Wordsworth of a work eventually published in an 1842 collection as ‘Guilt and Sorrow’. Thereafter, nineteen of the projected twenty-one Cornell volumes of poetry (expanded to cover the full poetical works, with an index to follow), each offering many new such reading texts, have so far appeared (see Poetry editions below). A section on the series in *The Wordsworth Circle*, 28:2 (Spring 1997), with an historical introduction by James A. Butler, includes Parrish’s latest consideration, ‘Versioning Wordsworth: A Study in Textual Ethics’.

While Parrish elaborated the rationale of his series in ‘The Worst of Wordsworth’, *The Wordsworth Circle* 7:2 (Spring 1976), and ‘The Editor as Archaeologist’, *Kentucky Review* 4 (1983), it was only in Gill’s first single volume selection, the Oxford Authors *William Wordsworth*, 1984, that the new principles were wholly followed so that ‘for the first time a selection of Wordsworth’s work [was] offered in which the poems [were] ordered according to the date of their composition [except the 1805 Prelude, which stands apart], and presented in texts which [gave] as nearly as possible their earliest completed state’. As a result, some manuscript versions that challenged the established textual canon, sometimes with unfamiliar titles, now became promoted for general and educational usage. Gill’s Note on the Text succinctly explains why he insists that ‘one must print a text which comes as close as possible to the state of a poem when it was first completed’.

The premises behind the procedures established in the Norton and Cornell editions had met with either enthusiasm or different degrees of scepticism from reviewers and critics. One influential and judicious response was delivered by Jack Stillinger in his article, ‘Textual Primitivism and the Editing of Wordsworth’, *SIR* 28:1 (Spring 1989), where he deprecated ‘the effacement of the later poet’ and the loss of ‘some of Wordsworth’s most admired writing’ in Gill’s selection. Nevertheless, he argued that despite ‘the

The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth. Textual Issues. Students of Wordsworth are confronted with an unusual array of different editions, especially of the poetry, which represent much more than commercial competition. Some of the leading issues in contemporary textual criticism have been pioneered in the conception of these editions as they have progressively sought to redefine the poet's works. So much is this so that an informed choice of texts must nowadays be the basis of any serious engagement with Wordsworth's writings. The prevailing questions have been long standing. Ways of Reading is a well-established core textbook that provides the reader with the tools to analyse and interpret the meanings of literary and non-literary texts. Six sections, split into self-contained units with their own activities and notes for further reading, cover: • basic techniques and problem-solving • language variation • attributing meaning • poetic uses of language • narrative • media texts. This third edition has been substantially revised and redesigned throughout with many fresh examples and exercises. It also explores the respective roles of the author and the reader in the process of creating and constraining meaning. Reading is a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols in order to construct or derive meaning. It is a means of language acquisition, of communication, and of sharing information and ideas. It is a complex interaction between the text and the reader which is shaped by the reader’s prior knowledge, experiences, attitude, and language community which is culturally and socially situated. The reading process requires continuous practice, development, and refinement. In addition, reading requires creativity and critical analysis. Consumers of literature make ventures with each piece, innately